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ABSTRACT

For this study, 47 students who had transferred from a community college were interviewed in an attempt to: determine the nature of their transfer; portray experiences surrounding the transfer process; document difficulties and successes encountered before, during, and after transfer; highlight advantages and disadvantages of transfer; and offer recommendations for improving the transfer process. Most interviewees reported that they commenced their studies at a community college with the intention to transfer to a university. Respondents gave a number of reasons for commencing their postsecondary studies at a community college first and then transferring to university, rather than entering university directly. Students were usually very attentive to the question of transferability. For the majority of students interviewed, the mechanics of the transfer process did not present an overwhelming source of distress. Of all the issues associated with transfer, the decline in grade point average after transfer was the most significant and the one that consistently caused students the most anxiety. The key disadvantages involved adapting to two different institutions and the extra demands placed on transfer students that were not expected of students who commenced their studies at the university. The report concludes with a list of recommendations for improving the transfer process. The report also includes interview questions used in the study, tables of sample bias, and the interview coding scheme in the appendices. (Contains 18 references.) (VWC)

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ED 444 627

# Investigating Transfer Project

## Phase I:

## Transfer Experiences of Students from Community College to University

**October 1997**

Prepared by:

**Lesley Andres**

**Adnan Qayyum**

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Centre for Policy Studies in Education
University of British Columbia

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**Investigating Transfer Project**

**Phase I:**
**Transfer Experiences of Students from Community College to University**

Prepared by:
Lesley Andres
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Jane Dawson

Centre for Policy Studies in Education
University of British Columbia
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## Executive Summary

## Investigating Transfer Project
## Phase I. Transfer Experiences of Students from Community College to University

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to interview university students who had transferred from community college. In particular, we sought to: 1) determine the nature of transfer, 2) portray experiences surrounding the transfer process, 3) document difficulties and successes encountered before, during, and after transfer, 4) highlight advantages and disadvantages of transfer, and 5) offer recommendations for improving the transfer process. This study complements other recent work on the issue of interinstitutional transfer in British Columbia (*e.g.*, see Andres, 1995; 1996; Gaylord, Ducharme & Associates, 1996).

### *Research Design*

In the fall of 1996, 394 students who had transferred from Douglas College to Simon Fraser University were sent letters inviting them to participate in a study of transfer. Students were also invited to share their transcripts with the researchers in order to verify the transfer of credit hours from community college to university.

In total, 65 students agreed to participate in this study. Over the course of six weeks, 47 individuals were interviewed (45 face-to-face and 2 telephone interviews). Although the number of students interviewed was considerably less than the sample of 150-200 as originally proposed, the researchers concluded that the 47 interviewees had exhausted or saturated the full range of topics on transfer.

Transcriptions from the interviews were used generate a coding scheme. Transcript data were coded and merged with institutional data. Quantified interview data are presented in tabular format, and the actual substance of the interviews – that is, the words of the students – are used to explain and highlight the tables.

### *Summary of the Findings*

Most students proceeded in a fairly direct line from high school to college to university. Most interviewees reported that they commenced their studies at a community college with the intention to transfer to university, and SFU was most frequently identified as the target university in mind. Most students knew exactly what program they wanted to enter from the beginning; a few others had changed their minds along the way. The most commonly cited program areas in which students specialized were general studies, business administration, and sciences. However, eight other program areas were identified.

Respondents gave a number of reasons for commencing their post-secondary studies at a community college first then transferring to university, rather than entering university directly. They often spoke of college as a "stepping stone" to university, a way of easing out of high school before hitting the rigours of university life. Some students attributed their decision to start at a community college to the financial incentive of lower tuition rates. Others said that since community college was reputed to be easier, it was a good way to embark on a post-secondary career with better chances of a higher GPA. For some students, entering into university directly from high school was not an option because their secondary school marks were not good enough. A number of respondents who were immigrants to Canada and spoke English as a second language said that they were not qualified for university admission. College was a way to get started on their post-secondary education until such time as they passed the TOEFL.

Because many of the respondents attended community college with the intention to transfer at some later date, they usually spoke of planning their college course schedule accordingly. Students were usually very attentive to the question of transferability, and were careful to take courses that they knew were transferable to university. Some students spoke of this process as being quite straightforward, simply a matter of reading the Douglas college calendar, and adhering to what the available information indicated was transferable and what was not. Others said that it was very complicated and confusing. The available information was insufficiently clear; it was hard to work out an acceptable schedule that satisfied the necessary transfer requirements; it was difficult to determine whether the information was current, to understand what it meant, or what aspects of it were most pertinent. Some students said that talking to academic advisors at Douglas College was helpful, and others said it was a waste of time, or that the advisors' advice was wrong or untrustworthy.

Yet on the whole, despite the different levels of complication identified with regard to getting the necessary transfer information from the various sources available, most students satisfactorily transferred most or all of the credit hours earned at the community college. If they had taken courses for which transfer credit was not a possibility, they typically knew it at the time. Obtaining transfer credit was, on the whole, not identified as a significant problem area.

For the majority of the students interviewed, the mechanics of the transfer process did not present an overwhelming source of distress. Even though the transfer of credit from Douglas College to SFU was on the whole unproblematic, there were several sources of concern. Some students identified problems associated with the transfer mechanism, that from their perspective, involved mistakes – or at least miscuing – on the part of one or the other of the institutions involved. This was often described as miscommunication between Douglas College and SFU. Many of accounts provided by interviewees involved an element of misunderstanding as a central component of the difficulties the students experienced. One aspect of misunderstanding involved the difficulties which some students' experienced in trying to make sense of the information available to them regarding how to go about transferring from one institution to another. There were also a number of problems that revolved around misunderstandings of the required procedures. Other areas of misunderstanding involved SFU's practice of bestowing "unassigned credits" in some transfer situations and the nature of their status upon acceptance into SFU (*i.e.*, general acceptance vs. acceptance into a program).

Of all the issues associated with transfer, the decline in GPA after transfer was the most significant and the one that consistently caused students the most anxiety. Only five of the 47 student interviewed reported an increase in grades following their transfer from college to university. These students claimed

their grades went up because they were more interested in the course material and were responding positively to the more challenging academic environment of the university. A few students claimed that their grades had stayed about the same. However, by far the majority of respondents reported that their GPA had gone down at university, and that in association with the decline in their grades, they had found the move from college to university difficult and stressful, sometimes to the point where they felt they had encountered a serious setback in achieving their academic goals. A few students reported being on "academic probation" because their grades had dropped to a level of marginal acceptability.

The interview respondents presented a number of different interpretations of the difference between college and university and what accounted for the decline in grades that they experienced. Many of them described college as being smaller, friendlier, and more supportive than university. They described SFU as being big, confusing, cold, impersonal, where it was hard to make friends and to penetrate the prevailing "nobody cares" attitude. Academically, they said that SFU was a much harder and more challenging learning environment, the amount of work was more extreme, the guidelines were less clear, and much more independent work and initiative were expected of them. Several students claimed that the smaller, friendlier atmosphere at Douglas College meant that instructors were more approachable and accessible, it was easier to speak out in class, and that opportunities for discussion and clarification of course material were more possible. Some were very critical of the attitudes of university professors relative to college instructors. Professors were occasionally perceived to be distant, inaccessible, and bounded by fewer expectations to be clear and communicative. However, some students claimed that college was too much like high school, that there was too much "spoon feeding," and that because it was easier to know what was going to be on the exam, one could memorize just enough to get by and then forget it.

In addition to matters of general atmosphere and instructional style, students also attributed their decline in grades to a difference between the Douglas College and SFU marking system. Many believed their marks went down because SFU "marked on a curve," which meant that the criteria for determining grades were much more stringent and competitive, and depended on the class average. Another aspect of this was non-commensurability of grades. For instance, 90% at Douglas College might count for an A+ whereas at SFU it might only count for an A-. In addition, students perceived that the competition was stiffer, that they were competing against students with higher average marks than at college, and with direct entry students who had the advantage of being more accustomed to how SFU operated and what was expected in the SFU system.

Some students spoke of having to change their study strategies to suit the SFU environment; the techniques they had learned for time management and information acquisition that worked in the college context did not serve them well at university. Although some students claimed that the greater challenge associated with university caused them to learn more, others said that they learned less because they did not have the opportunity for discussion that helped them learn, and because the university climate was one that promoted "grade thirst" at the expense of "knowledge hunger".

Most interviewees maintained that despite the annoyances related to the transfer process and a declining grade point average after transfer, in the long run, transferring from community college to university was the preferred route. Community college was described as having provided solid preparation that eased the transition to university. This ease of transition was reported most often as the major advantage of transfer. Only a handful of students were dissatisfied with their chosen educational trajectory. Some

would have preferred to complete the requirements for their degree within the confines of a small, intimate climate afforded by the community college. A few others felt that they should have delayed transfer to SFU. Yet, a small minority claimed there was little difference between the two institutions.

The key disadvantages specified involved adapting to two different institutions and the extra demands placed on transfer students that were not expected of students who commenced their studies at university. These demands included being aware of the transfer process, enroling in courses that were transferable, and spending considerable amounts of time on processes and procedures related to transfer.

***Recommendations***

Based on the findings of this study, we offer the following recommendations:

1. A user friendly *Transfer Handbook for Students* should be developed by the BCCAT. The purpose of this document would be to explain the mechanisms and process of transfer to students in a clear, unambiguous, easily understandable manner. By incorporating some of the anecdotes from this report into the document, potential transferees would benefit from the experiences of students who had successfully completed the transfer process.

2. Receiving institutions should provide transfer students with a written explanation for each course that was not fully transferable. This type of documentation (which could be as simple as a checklist) could also be used for statistical purposes. That is, data generated from this type of documentation could be used to conduct analyses which would inform both sending and receiving institutions of recurrent incompatibilities in the system.

3. The process of imparting information about the transfer process should be reviewed. Students should be informed that advising is available at both sending and receiving institutions. Advisors should be responsible for ensuring that students receive accurate information. Availability of advisors (*i.e.*, hours of operation) should correspond to the needs of students. Mandatory advising sessions for all students intending to transfer could reduce the amount of confusion and frustration experienced by transfer students.

4. The coding scheme in Appendix C should be converted into a survey questionnaire and administered to first year transfer students at all British Columbia universities. In many respects, this study has been a "best case scenario" in that it examined the transfer experiences of students from institutions working in close co-operation with each other. A larger study employing survey methodology would increase the generalizability of the findings of this study and would serve to identify other problems related to transfer.

5. Community colleges and universities should continue to address the problem of declining grades after transfer. Ongoing dialogue and examination of teaching and learning practices at each type of institution could help to facilitate a smooth transition from community college to university for transfer students.

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Most importantly, we thank the student respondents who volunteered their time to participate in this study.

## I. Canadian and British Columbia Transfer Statistics

The development of the community college system in British Columbia was designed to reflect the needs of a pluralistic and heterogeneous population, for, as Macdonald (1962) emphasized, "to insist that each [institution] . . . train young men and women in the same way is to confuse the aims and methods of education" (p.54). The introduction of the community college system into the higher education system in Canada was intended as a democratizing strategy, designed to reflect the needs of a pluralistic and heterogeneous population by providing alternate types and levels of education for those without the requisite ability to attend university. Community colleges have also enabled those from less privileged backgrounds to pursue post-secondary studies by offering university-equivalent courses (as well as vocational, technical, career, academic upgrading and continuing education courses), lower tuition fees, flexible admission requirements, and programs located within commuting distance (Alberta Advanced Education, 1984; Dennison & Gallagher, 1986; Fortin, 1987). Beinder (1983) argued that the community college system in British Columbia was "a social invention, whole and legitimate in its own right, designed to solve a particular kind of problem created by a highly complex society" (p.1). Advocates of the community college system claim that these colleges contribute to society by providing the technical skills needed by an increasingly complex economy.

In terms of life chances, however, critics allege that attendance at a community college is far from democratizing (Karabel, 1986; Pincus, 1986). Scholars who subscribe to the class-reproduction school describe community colleges not "as new avenues of opportunity for the previously disenfranchised" (Dennison & Gallagher, 1986, p.162), but largely as dumping grounds for minority and disadvantaged youngsters where aspirations are "cooled out" (Clark, 1960). Anisef (1985) argues that what has been referred to in Canada as a "pluralistic education system" camouflages the hierarchical relationships that exist among post-secondary institutions and serves to obscure and mystify the reality of the choice situation for students when they are choosing a

particular post-secondary institution. Coleman and Husén (1985) detect a trend in OECD countries, that of an emergence of a new stratification in an era of educational egalitarianism.

Available Canadian and British Columbia transfer statistics collected in the late 1980s did not bode well for the egalitarian argument. Of the Grade 12 graduates[1] in British Columbia who entered the post-secondary system in the 1985/86 year, 64% entered community colleges and 36% directly entered universities[2] (Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, 1987). In 1985, the estimated total transfer rates from British Columbia community colleges to universities ranged from 14 to 51% with a median rate of 29% (Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training, 1987). It was estimated that degree completion rates of students transferring from college to university ranged from 8 to 32% compared with degree completion rates of 29 to 56% for those students directly entering university (p.10). The B.C. Council on Admissions and Transfer (1989) reported that second year enrolment in the college and institute sector as a percentage of first year decreased to 20% in 1987, a decrease affecting both university transfer and career programs. Between 1981 and 1987 the percentage had been stable at 22% (p.1). The Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training (1987) concluded:

> on average less than one in four full-time students who begin college academic programs can expect to end up with a first degree. Looking at it another way, those who begin studies at university have twice the chance of completion as those who begin college. (p.11)

The Report of the British Columbia Provincial Access Committee (1988) indicated that quotas were placed on both the number of students admitted to universities and the number of transfer students accepted from colleges. Thus, those who are currently over-represented in the community college

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[1] Of this total cohort, 28.5% continued on to a community college, and 16.7% entered a university.

[2] The Report of the Standing Committee on National Finance (1987) reports that of all the provinces, British Columbia has the lowest percentage of students entering directly into university. It could be argued that because of the nature of post-secondary education in British Columbia, many students have chosen to complete one or two years of university-equivalent courses at community colleges, thus lowering the numbers entering university. Alberta, however, with a similar post-secondary structure, reports a transition rate of 26.9% for students entering directly into university. Although Alberta has the second lowest transition rate to university, it is much closer than British Columbia to the national average of 29.3%. [3] Although an additional 18 individuals completed consent forms, the researchers were unable to contact them. Problems included incorrect phone numbers, unanswered pagers and telephone messages, and missed interview appointments.



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system in British Columbia were the most likely to be affected by these policies. Karabel (1986) laments:

> from the perspective of equality of opportunity, the implications of this pattern of overrepresentation - one in which individuals from working-class and minority backgrounds tend to be concentrated in the very institutions that offer them the least chance of obtaining a bachelor's degree - are sobering. ( p.17)

Coleman and Husén (1985) comment on the paradoxical nature of educational opportunity today. They note that there are more available places in post-secondary education than any other time in history; yet, as participation rates climb there is a concomitant escalation of competition for these places, and in particular, university places.

More recently, two studies have been undertaken to explore the transfer process. First, to better understand the dynamics of transfer among the various types of post-secondary institutions, a series of questions related to intended and actual transfer were included on the 1993 follow-up survey of the longitudinal study of British Columbia high school graduates (Andres, 1995). Forty-eight percent of respondents to this question indicated that they had indeed intended to transfer and further specified the type of transfer they had intended to make. The most common type of intended transfer was from community college to university. Of individuals intending to transfer from one post-secondary institution to another, 65% reported that they **actually did** transfer from one institution to another. However, almost half indicated that during the transfer process they had experienced a loss of credit for course work completed and over one third reported that they had experienced difficulties registering for required courses at the transfer institution. Other difficulties included poor counselling and errors encountered during the transfer process.

A second analysis was conducted by Gaylord, Ducharme & Associates (1996). By employing 1995 and 1996 data (n=14,534) available from the B.C. college and institutes' *Student Outcomes Survey*, this study sought to determine 1) the extent and nature of transfer undertaken by graduates of B.C. community college and institutes and 2) difficulties encountered in transferring credits from one institution to another. Overall, 69% of graduates continued their studies and the majority of transfers (62%) were from a B.C. community college to a B.C. university. Only three questions on the survey instrument were specific to the issue transfer and focused on transfer of credits. Of the academic students who continued their studies, 16% reported encountering difficulties with transferring credit from one institution to another. Almost 60% of this group

indicated that they were unable to transfer credits. Analyses of open ended comments revealed several other difficulties, including courses not accepted by the receiving institution and discontent with articulation rules.

## II. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

British Columbia has one of the most sophisticated sets of transfer arrangements in existence. However, transfer difficulties, either perceived or real, continue to be reported in research studies or anecdotally. Clearly, a large body of research exists to inform policy and practice related to transfer. Yet, the degree to which students experience problems during the transfer process remains unclear and several research questions remain unanswered. These questions include:

1. What is meant by "intent to transfer?"
2. How do students seek information regarding the transfer process? What roles do sending and receiving institutions play in the transfer process (*e.g.*, counselling, providing information, liaising with transfer institutions)?
3. What problems do students encounter in the transfer process? Are these problems institutionally related (*e.g.*, difficulties with course transfer, inability to transfer to university because of quotas) or are problems perceptual (e.g., lack of understanding about transfer credit).
4. In which of the three stages of transfer (before, during, or after transfer) are difficulties encountered?
5. What institutional policies and practices facilitate successful and non-problematic transfer between institutions? What individual student characteristics facilitate transfer?

To investigate these questions, a three phase approach to the study of transfer has been employed. In this report, the findings of *Phase 1* are documented. *Phase 1* entailed a study of university students who had completed the transfer process. Through interviews with these students, the purpose of the study was to focus on questions two through five. In particular, we sought to

determine : 1) the nature of transfer, 2) experiences surrounding the transfer process, 3) difficulties and successes encountered before, during, and after transfer, 4) advantages and disadvantages of transfer, and 5) recommendations for improving the transfer process. This study complements other recent work on the issue of interinstitutional transfer in British Columbia (*e.g.*, see Andres, 1995; 1996; Gaylord, Ducharme & Associates, 1996).

## III. Sample, Data Collection, and Method

In the fall of 1996, the names of 394 students who had transferred from Douglas College to Simon Fraser University were provided to the researcher by the Office of Analytic Studies at SFU. On January 3, 1996, each of these students was sent a letter inviting them to participate in a study of transfer (see Appendix A). Students were also invited to share their transcripts with the researchers in order to verify the transfer of credit hours from community college to university.

Douglas College and Simon Fraser University were chosen as sites for this study for the following reasons. These institutions are located in close geographical proximity to each other; hence, Douglas College serves as a "feeder" institution to Simon Fraser University. Because of the large number of transfer students, a close working relationship ensues between the two institutions.

In total, 65 students agreed to participate in this study by returning the consent forms. Each student was contacted by telephone to arrange a face-to-face interview. Over the course of six weeks, 47 individuals[3] were interviewed (45 face-to-face and 2 telephone interviews). Interviews were approximately 30 minutes in length and were recorded on audio tape (see Appendix A for a list of the interview questions). Although the number of students interviewed was considerably less than the sample of 150-200 as originally proposed, the researchers concluded that the 47 interviewees had exhausted or saturated the full range of topics on transfer. The extent of sample bias can be determined by comparing various characteristics of the interviewees in this study with the total sample of 400 individuals who were invited to participate in this study. As Tables 38 to 41 in Appendix B reveal, when compared with full sample of 394, the interview sample was biased towards women, younger students, and those with higher admission grade point averages.

All interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions were read, first, to generate a coding scheme (Appendix C) then were reread and coded according to the coding scheme. An SPSS file was

generated from the coded data and merged with institutional data to permit an analysis of the frequency of responses to a given question. In the *Findings* section of this document, the quantified interview data are presented in tabular format, and the actual substance of the interviews – that is, the words of the students – are used to explain and highlight the tables.

Given the small sample size, frequencies reported in this study are to be interpreted with caution. They are meant only to provide a gross indication of the degree to which responses were shared among interviewees. Not all interviewees responded to all questions. In all instances, data provided in the tables reflects the valid percent of responses.

It must be emphasized that the findings reported in this study reflect the views of the student interviewees. Students' perceptions may not be consistent with actual policy and practice at Douglas College or Simon Fraser Unversity. The purpose of this study is not to refute students' perceptions in light of actual institutional practice, but rather to portray these perceptions as expressed by interviewees.

## IV. Findings

The Results section of this report is organized into four sections including: student characteristics, experiences before transfer, the transfer process, and experiences after transfer.

### A. Student Characteristics

#### *Demographic Characteristics*

Tables 1 and 2 indicate that slightly more females than males participated in the interviews and that the majority were 20 to 22 years of age. Only four individuals in this study were over the age of 25.

**Table 1. Gender**

%

| | |
|---|---|
| Male | 42 |
| Female | 58 |

n=47

**Table 2. Birth Year**

| | % |
|---|---|
| Before 1970 | 4 |
| 1970 to 1974 | 42 |
| 1975 to 1977 | 53 |

n=47

***Post-secondary Trajectory***

Over half (55%) of the interviewees attended Douglas College directly out of high school, then transferred to SFU (Table 3). The second most common trajectory involved transferring from SFU after having been out of school for a period of time.

**Table 3. Transfer Route Taken by Students**

| | % |
|---|---|
| High school to DC to SFU | 55 |
| Non-school to DC to SFU | 17 |
| Other college to DC to SFU | 3 |
| Other trajectory | 21 |
| University to DC to SFU | 3 |

n=29

***Program Specialization***

As depicted in Table 4, interviewees in this study were enrolled in a wide variety of programs. Although not representative of the full range of course offerings, participants in this study were not concentrated in a one or two programs.

**Table 4. Program Specialization of Transfer Students at SFU**

| | % |
|---|---|
| Business | 17 |
| Communications | 5 |
| Criminology | 12 |
| Education | 7 |
| Fine arts | 2 |
| General studies | 26 |
| History | 5 |
| Physical education | 2 |
| Political science | 2 |
| Psychology | 7 |
| Sciences | 14 |

n=42

***Admission GPA***

Over half (55%) of the interviewees had obtained a university admission GPA of 3.00 or greater and 44% had earned an admission GPA of between 2.50 and 2.99. Table 5 was generated from institutional records provided by SFU.

**Table 5. University Admission GPA**

| | % |
|---|---|
| Less than 2.49 | 0 |
| 2.50 to 2.99 | 44 |
| 3.00 to 3.49 | 33 |
| 3.50 to 4.00 | 22 |

n=47

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***Declared Major***

Almost all of the students who answered this question indicated that they had declared a major before transfer (Table 6). Also, over three quarters stayed with the major they declared (Table 7).

**Table 6. When Students Declared Their Major at SFU**

| | % |
|---|---|
| Before transfer | 92 |
| After transfer | 8 |

n=25

**Table 7. Changes in Program Major by Students Who Declared in Advance**

| | % |
|---|---|
| Stayed with major | 77 |
| Changed major | 12 |
| No program before transferring | 8 |
| Couldn't/can't get into major | 4 |

n=26

***Registration Status***

Almost all of those interviewed (94%) reported that they had commenced their studies in 1996. The remainder began at SFU in 1995. Most (80%) interviewees were studying full-time (Table 8). A small proportion attended Douglas College and SFU concurrently or in various combinations of full and part-time.

**Table 8. Status of Transfer Students at SFU**

| | % |
|---|---|
| Full -time | 80 |
| Part-time | 12 |
| Full-time and part-time | 4 |
| Full-time between the two institutions | 4 |

n=25

***Reasons for Commencing Studies at Douglas College***

Interviewees were asked to indicate why they began their studies at Douglas College before transferring to SFU. The range of responses provided is portrayed in Table 9. The most common responses included perceiving that commencing studies at a community college would provide a stepping stone to university, lower costs, and geographic proximity. Fourteen percent of interviewees indicated that they attended Douglas College after having been refused university admission.

**Table 9. Specific Reason for Going to Douglas College Before SFU**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| College as stepping stone | 36 |
| Cheaper cost at college | 31 |
| Geographically closer | 25 |
| College as second chance (*e.g.*, lower entrance requirements) | 17 |
| Refused university admission | 14 |
| Language requirements (TOEFL) | 11 |
| No previous experience in post-secondary education | 8 |
| Reputation of college as easier | 3 |
| Learning disability | 3 |
| No particular focus | 3 |
| Unable to transfer previous university credits to university | 3 |
| Was accepted at SFU but told to make other arrangements by SFU | 3 |

n=36

The following comments by interviewees illustrate their rationale for the reasons summarized in Table 9.

*Cost:*

> Cheaper cost. I'd been out of school for a year, I wanted to slowly reintegrate myself and I didn't originally live on the mainland and I knew New Westminster well. I was more comfortable moving down here by myself and in a place where I knew the area.

> Mostly because of money. That was it. I guess maybe it was a little bit the smaller classes and that was about it. Sort of ease myself into university plus the money. It was cheaper.

*Alternative to University:*

> I choose to study in Douglas because I could not get into university. So after high school the only way, the alternative path to get into university for me, is to study college. Rather than retaking grade 12 course to get high grades.

*Language Requirements Lacking for University:*

> I have to tell you about my background. I finish my elementary English and I come here and try to apply to university but both reject me because my TOEFL not good enough. I have no choice. I have to go to college to continue study. I went to college.

> When I first came here [from overseas] at first I couldn't get into SFU or UBC because I didn't have my TOEFL at that time. That's why I went to colleges because I didn't want to waste time waiting for my TOEFL.

*Easier Transition:*

> Because basically I was from a small town and I didn't want to go straight into a huge university and I thought I'd start out small. That's the only reason.

> I didn't know what I was going to do. Like I wanted to go to UBC's rehab. medicine programme, but I didn't get in and I hadn't applied up here, I never even considered coming up here, cause I didn't really know about anything here, so I said, okay, I'll go to Douglas and just think about it. And then through talking to people I found out about Kinesiology and decided okay, this is what I want to do.

## B. Experiences Before Transfer

As outlined in the review of the literature, students may encounter several barriers to transfer. In this section, we document students' experiences before the actual transfer has taken place. These experiences include: timing of intent to transfer, resources students used to facilitate the transfer process, difficulties with accessing and using resources, experiences with advisors and counsellors at Douglas College and SFU, reasons for course selection at Douglas College, and the factors facilitating transfer.

### *Intent to Transfer*

For the vast majority (85%) of interviewees, transfer to university was premeditated early in their post-secondary careers. That is, they intended to transfer either before or from the outset of attending Douglas College (Table 10). Only one individual decided to transfer after having completed studies at Douglas College.

**Table 10. When Did Students Plan or Intended to Transfer**

| | % |
|---|---|
| Before or from the outset of attending DC | 85 |
| During studies at DC | 13 |
| Upon completion at DC | 3 |

n=40

Most interviewees intended to transfer to SFU, while others reported that they had considered transferring to SFU, UBC, or UVic. One student had considered transferring to BCIT. Six individuals had applied to both SFU and UBC, and a further two individuals had applied to UVic and SFU.

***Resources Used***

Interviewees were asked to indicate all of the resources they used to assist them with the transfer process. Table 11 lists the resources identified by students. Most commonly used were the Douglas College and SFU calendars, followed by academic advisors at Douglas College. SFU advisors were used somewhat less often.

**Table 11. Specific Resources Used**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| Douglas Calendar | 51 |
| SFU Calendar | 51 |
| Academic advisor at DC | 49 |
| Advisor at SFU | 27 |
| Other students who were going to transfer to SFU | 24 |
| Counsellor at DC | 24 |
| Transfer Guide | 13 |
| Brothers and sisters or other family members | 13 |
| Students who had already transferred | 13 |
| Student services office at Douglas | 11 |
| Brochures or handouts provided at DC | 11 |
| Instructor at DC | 9 |
| UBC guide-calendar | 9 |
| Administrative personnel at SFU (other than above) | 4 |
| Professor at SFU | 2 |

n=45

The following comments illustrate how students used the various resources available to them:

*Advisors:*

> I didn't actually talk to anybody up here until I phoned the Academic Advisor about the program and at that time I wanted to talk to her about, you know, what I should be taking and what I should be doing. And I just had to phone conversation with her. I didn't actually come up and meet her. Just spoke to her on the phone and she was also very helpful, like I said, she put me in the department and she gave me some ideas on the courses I should be, you know looking at.

> [It] was through the Advisor and, because like I said, she worked with me quite well, all the way through. I was probably in there about once every, at least once a month.



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> I just got the application and did it and went over it with my academic advisor then put it in. I didn't look at the SFU calendar until I got in.

*Calendars and Other Printed Materials:*

> I got some information from Douglas college and I went and got a calendar from SFU and I went and got an application process from SFU and I just filled it out and that was about it. I got a transcript from Douglas and sent it to SFU.

> I don't remember the exact name of the office, but Douglas College had an office with all of the calendars for other of the larger universities and stuff like that and what courses they offered and exactly, they had sheets printed up of exactly what courses were needed at Douglas College to transfer, what courses they would transfer to, everything. It was very straightforward.

> I looked at an SFU calendar as well as a Douglas calendar and a transfer calendar. And had to look at the prerequisites for SFU entrance and all that. And I fulfilled those credits at Douglas. I kept up with it, made sure there was no course changes or anything like that and it was pretty straightforward. Transferred to SFU.

*Friends:*

> Basically most of the information I got was from friends.

> I sort of found them out from my friends. If you want to do something you have to do it by yourself. If your not interested in it nobody is going to help you. You have to ask first. So I sort of found out myself by asking people.

> Actually I spoke to some students that I had know at Douglas college that had taken courses at SFU as well as Douglas college and I asked them about the transfer process. They gave me quite a lot of information. They told me I shouldn't rely wholly on what [Douglas College advisors] were telling me, instead I should come on over to SFU here and talk to the education advisors.

Most interviewees (66%) reported using three or more resources to help them with the transfer process. Only two individuals (4%) claimed that they did not use any resources at all.

The BCCAT Transfer Guide was not a commonly used resource. However, Table 12 indicates that of those who referred to it, most found it to be useful. Only a small proportion indicated that the Transfer Guide was confusing or inaccurate.

**Table 12. Rating of BCCAT Transfer Guide**

| | % |
|---|---|
| Useful | 81 |
| Confusing | 9 |
| Inaccurate | 9 |

n=12

*Helpful:*

> I had no problem at all. I mean the catalogue is a big help. . . All the courses are listed there. They tell you which are transferable, which aren't. Like, again for me I knew that I wanted to go into education so I knew what courses.

*Confusing:*

> I found it too much because it's for the whole province and I wish it was a little bit more general in the beginning. Just have an overview kind of descriptive thing about how to use this guide. I think there was but it wasn't that clear. It took me awhile to figure it out. I think generally there wasn't a lot of resources available.

> The only place I have a guide was Douglas college then I realize the BCCAT have a transfer guide, then I look at that but sometimes I find it not sure whether it really transfers or not. . . .Yea, not very up to date some time. Because it's so confusing. We don't know what it means for second year course, third year course and fourth year course. In some requirements they say you need second year English credit but for Douglas college sometimes it's a 300, 400, I have a course that is chemistry, no mathematics 421, and it transfer to SFU 310. Sometimes I get confused because college, many course they have first year and second year but sometimes when they transfer to SFU they have third year and sometimes second year, third year. We don't know if the requirement asked by university a second year course or third year course. I don't really get it when I was in college. So I had to look in the transfer guide to see if this was a second year course or a third year course in Douglas or university. Sometimes in UBC that third year course when you come to SFU is a second year course.

Thirty-two percent or 15 interviewees claimed that they had difficulty using the available resources. These difficulties are summarized in Table 13. Overall, most of the difficulties reported by students appear to be related to considerable confusion about the transfer mechanism in general and information contained in printed materials. The Douglas College calendar was perceived to be more understandable than the SFU calendar.

**Table 13. Specific Difficulties with Resources Used**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| SFU calendar confusing | 27 |
| Various types of admission confusing | 20 |
| BCCAT transfer guide confusing | 13 |
| BCCAT transfer guide not up to date | 13 |
| Incorrect information provided by counsellors | 13 |
| Difference between departments (*e.g.*, psychology in arts vs. psychology in science) | 13 |
| Understanding the transfer mechanism | 13 |
| No real systematic use of resources | 13 |
| No one person/resource holds all the information | 13 |
| Reluctant to approach counsellors / advisors | 7 |
| Differences between 100 / 200 / 300 / 400 level courses | 7 |
| Lack of personal focus made resources less than helpful | 7 |
| DC calendar confusing | 6 |

n=35

The difficulties encountered when trying to used resources are described by interviewees:

> [At] some point I got very confused. I got to see the SFU calendar and UBC calendar. . . .The minimum required credit to transfer and when I considered those, the question in my mind is when could I transfer, how could I transfer and these two questions. So one question I just concerned with the credit hours minimum for me to transfer then I look through all the calendar and I find it's 24 credit hours. There is so many type of admission. If you get under that the university will see your grade 12 marks. If you're over that but not up to 24 I don't know what they do with it. If you achieve 24 credit they just look at your college. Then I try to think how they see the GPA. If the just look at my college grades and not high school grades, it's a different thing. Have to consider whether the more credit I have, when I enter will the requirement of GPA be lower. So I have to consider that too.

> At some times when I ask people what's going on around or certain things that I needed, I would find that nobody has all the information and some of the things would be quite difficult to get around.

> There were no real resources, honestly, in terms of if the transfer occurred in the last year, there was no resources. It was just me, writing letters. That's basically what it was, just writing letters to faculty and having my, submitting my transcript. I submitted so many transcripts. I really can't say resources came into play.

> In terms of the actual transfer, I take upon myself, there's nothing they could have done better, smarter, whatever because I basically removed them from the picture.

> Well, before you try and check to see, you have to get a transcript of your grades and courses and then you have to check the transfer guide and it has a big listing of all the colleges and what they transfer, the course. That was a big hassle because some of the courses I couldn't find. Some of the courses were just kind of like, wasn't anything specific because I was like "does it transfer or not?". I was worried it just said "business" and that's it. Then I found out later it's just a business credit, there was nothing.

***Advisors and Counsellors***

As depicted in Table 14, the majority of interviewees consulted with a Douglas College advisor *only* before transfer. Only 13% indicated that they had consulted with a Douglas College and SFU counsellor before and during the transfer process, and an additional 18% indicated that they had sought the assistance of a Douglas College advisor before transfer, and an SFU advisor after transfer.

**Table 14. Sequence in Which Students Contacted Advisors[4]**

| | % |
|---|---|
| DC only before transfer | 41 |
| DC before transfer, SFU after transfer | 18 |
| DC and SFU before and during the planning process | 13 |
| No contact with counsellors | 13 |
| SFU only before transfer | 10 |
| SFU only after transfer | 3 |

n=39

Approximately equal proportions of students reported positive and negative experiences with Douglas College counsellors and advisors (Table 15). Although SFU advisors and counsellors were not consulted as often as their counterparts at Douglas College, students were more likely to report positive experiences with the university advisors.

[4] Interviewees did not make clear distinctions between the roles of counsellors and advisors at either institution.

**Table 15. Students' Experiences with Advisors and Counsellors Douglas College**

| | DC Counsellors % | SFU Counsellors % |
|---|---|---|
| Negative experience | 42 | 29 |
| Indifferent | 13 | 12 |
| Positive experience | 46 | 59 |
| | n=24 | n=17 |

Advisors and counsellors who provided information verbally about what courses to take, distributed handouts about exact courses needed for specific programs, and imparted information about where to look in calendars and transfer guides were identified by students as helpful. The following comments provided a verbal illustration of positive experiences.

> Yea, it was a very straightforward process. Here [at SFU] they were just as good, they made a calendar available for me. She told me what problems I might have in the transfer and what I should make sure I do and make sure I come back to SFU and know that the courses were still the same, and all that.

> Everyone was helpful at Douglas and SFU. I got the information that I wanted. I actually made an appointment at SFU. That was when I got my application package. So she explained a lot to me. She was helpful . . They pretty much answered all my questions.

However, the counselling experience was described as negative if advisors and counsellors provided information that was wrong, out of date, overwhelming, and/or inconsistent. No information, not enough information, and unavailability of advisors were also deemed to contribute to a negative experience.

> After my last term at Douglas College, I went to work full-time and consequently I couldn't really get in to see any advisors or counsellors because when I quit work, they quit work . . . . I was very very confused as to which direction , which department I was going it. I really didn't have any guidance simply because I couldn't access it.

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> I have my own counsellor outside of the Educational field so. I was, I had some guidance but it wasn't really solid. It never really gave me the adequate information I needed. . . . I just finally got enrolled in the Department of Arts, Faculty of Arts, you know, after being in Education for so long and you know, phoning people and going back and forth, in was confusing and pretty frustrating, to be honest.
>
> This is something I still feel, cause I've only been up here a year now and compared to college, the people up here were not helpful. [Douglas College counsellors] knew a bit here and there. But certain questions like I remember I was contemplating certain areas that I wanted to concentrate in and the counsellors didn't know very much about that and then they would go, "well you should go up to SFU and ask." Every time I came up here it's like nobody would pay attention to you.
>
> That is what kind of ticked me off was people at Douglas didn't really know, they said I should talk to people at SFU and when I talked to people at SFU they said did "you have a student number" and I said it's pending, it's in process and they said "well we can't help you yet until you get your application through and it's official that you're in." So they said "we can't talk to you." What about my courses? I have to know what to take and they're like "well you'll have to talk to your resources at Douglas" so they sent me back. Eventually I just said forget it and I just read very carefully what I needed to do. I found it's not very clear. They don't make it easy to follow, step by step, like "here's what you have to do." It's like you have to get this form and this form and send it off. Then they said you have to get a transcript and send it to SFU but then they didn't say whether or not you could look at it, like open it. They didn't say send it sealed so there is a lot of little things that drove me insane.
>
> There should be people like from SFU going to the colleges and talking to people, maybe. Like counsellors and stuff. 'Cause sometimes I found that like, if I went to go talk to a counsellor from Douglas, they didn't know too much. . . . . one person would tell you one thing and sometimes another person would tell you another thing. You're totally confused.

### *Course Selection at the Community College*

When asked why they chose courses at Douglas College, almost all individuals indicated that they had deliberately selected courses that were transferable. However, as reported in Table 16, students also enrolled in courses out of interest or to fulfil the requirements for a program at Douglas College. Only three individuals (9%) indicated that their course selection was haphazard and not at all guided by transfer requirements.

**Table 16. Specific Reasons for Choosing Courses at Douglas College**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| Took courses that were transferable | 97 |
| Took courses for interest | 21 |
| No clue | 9 |
| Took courses specific to a program at DC | 9 |
| Took courses to fulfil requirements for associate degree | 3 |
| Took courses that were easy | 3 |

n=33

### *Factors Facilitating Transfer*

Over 40% of interviewees indicated that at least one of the factors listed in Table 17 facilitated transfer. The Douglas College and SFU calendars were most frequently identified as useful in facilitating the transfer process.

**Table 17. Specific Factors That Facilitated Transfer**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| DC calendar | 37 |
| SFU calendar | 26 |
| Counseling at DC | 16 |
| Talking with people | 16 |
| D.C. workshops | 11 |
| SFU registration book | 5 |
| Helpful staff registrar's office | 5 |
| Counselling (unspecified) | 5 |
| Transfer guide | 5 |
| Being able to do everything over the phone | 5 |

n=19

Students provided the following commentary on the topic of resources facilitating transfer:

> That was one thing at Douglas and at SFU, the course catalogues are really good in terms of saying if this is where you want to be then this is what you have to take.

> Douglas is obviously not a place where you can get a degree from so they will take you as far as you can be and then if you want to go further then you got it, now go.
>
> Definitely the counselling, getting the help from them . . . And then just using the calendars was good.
>
> Well I think that what helped was when I left Douglas [Student Services] gave me a list of SFU's programs for criminology so it would say this course, you need to take this course for undergrad. So I followed that along . . . They just hand out a check off sheet that would be transferable for that specific program.

## C. The Transfer Process

The research literature identifies several obstacles to successful transfer during the second stage or "transfer process" stage. These obstacles include problems in gaining admission to the receiving institution, obtaining financial aid, and the need to move to a new institution. In this section, we summarize the findings related to the transfer process stage under the following headings: the admission process, transferability of credits, criteria for transferring credit, transfer involving a third institution, financial aid, attending the sending and receiving institution concurrently, registration at the university, and transfer as a mystifying process.

### *The Admission Process*

More than two-thirds of students interviewed indicated that gaining admission to SFU was not problematic (Table 18).

**Table 18. Difficulties in Getting Admission into SFU**

| | % |
|---|---|
| No difficulties | 71 |
| Difficulties | 30 |

n=44

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As the following comments indicate, some described the transfer process as "smooth" and "a breeze."

> In terms of the transfer, it was just a smooth sort of process. It wasn't a big deal or hassle.
>
> It's been really smooth for me. Yea. It's been so easy, like I said, I mean, I, you know, I applied to come here. I got my courses transferred, no problem.
>
> So far my transfer process was quite smooth. I didn't experience any major hitches that could make me think of other possible reparations to be done somewhere or elsewhere. It was quite smooth.
>
> It was quite simple because I didn't need to do anything. As soon as I applied I got in right. All the courses that were transferable, all transferred. . . .It went automatically. So there wasn't much I had to do.

The remaining 30% pointed out several difficulties with the admission process. These difficulties are summarized in Table 19. Most frequently cited were repeated attempts required to gain admission and TOEFL scores that did not meet the minimum admission standard.

**Table 19. Specific Difficulties in Getting Admission to SFU**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| Getting in after initially not getting in | 33 |
| TOEFL scores held up admission | 33 |
| Low GPA | 17 |
| Need more transfer credit | 17 |
| Transcript delivery problems | 17 |
| Quota system | 8 |
| Needed more required course work | 8 |

n=12

Students' own words highlight some of these difficulties:

> I had to an extra semester before I came up here 'cause I was, right before I was going to put in my application I found out there was a course I had to take so that put everything off by another, you know, semester. . . . I had planned to come for the fall. So I had to put everything off till January.
>
> I realized, [SFU] very strongly adheres to the principals they put forth. They don't say if it's [a GPA of] 2.75, if you're a nice person and you write well, we'll give you a 2.6.

As Table 20 depicts, 30% of participants in this study indicated that they were not accepted into their desired program. Specific reasons for lack of admission into programs are summarized in Table 21. The most common reason for denied admission was a low GPA.

**Table 20. Student's Accepted in Desired Program**

| | % |
|---|---|
| Not accepted | 30 |
| Accepted | 53 |
| Still doing general studies | 17 |

n=30

**Table 21. Specific Reasons for Not Being Accepted into Desired Program**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| GPA too low | 50 |
| Did not have prerequisites | 17 |
| Applied too late | 17 |
| Difficulty transferring credits | 17 |

n=6

***Transferability of Credits***

Table 22 compares the number of credit hours transferred according to SFU records with self-reports provided by students. There is close agreement between students' perceptions and institutional records.

**Table 22. Number of Credits Transferred**

| | According to SFU Records % | According to Interviewees % |
|---|---|---|
| Less than 30 | 3 | 4 |
| 30 to 39 | 19 | 20 |
| 40 to 49 | 19 | 24 |
| 50-59 | 26 | 24 |
| 60 | 31 | 27 |

n=39

As Table 23 indicates, almost half of respondents indicated that one or more courses were not transferable. This figure is somewhat higher than the figure of 16% reported by Gaylord, Ducharme & Associates (1996). It must be noted, however, that Gaylord, Ducharme & Associates do not report the incidence of problems with credit transfer by students who transferred from community college to university. Interestingly, 50% of those who transferred less than 60 credits and 53% of those who transferred a full 60 credits reported that some of the credits earned at Douglas College were not transferable to SFU.

**Table 23. One or More Courses Were Not Transferable**

| | % |
|---|---|
| No | 46 |
| Yes | 54 |

n=46

Table 24 reports the actual number of times a particular course was identified by a student as not being transferable.

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**Table 24. Specific Courses Which Were Not Transferable**

| | frequency |
|---|---|
| Accounting | 5 |
| Sociology | 3 |
| Study course | 2 |
| ESL | 2 |
| Psychology | 2 |
| Marketing | 2 |
| Business | 2 |
| Mathematics | 2 |
| Anthropology | 2 |
| Economics | 2 |
| Theatre | 1 |
| Biology | 1 |
| Philosophy | 1 |
| Communication | 1 |
| Political science | 1 |
| Physical education | 1 |
| French | 1 |
| Unspecified | 2 |

n=22

Except for accounting, no one particular course stands out as being particularly problematic. The following comments may offer an explanation regarding the difficulty with the transfer of accounting credits.

> In order to take accounting 210 I have to have prerequisite of accounting 110. And I took it [at a private college] and I ask for one of the people in the department office if I need to have the prerequisite for that and they sign me up a permission so I can take accounting 210 but later I found out my accounting 110 wasn't transferred to Douglas because they needed to have accounting 110 and 210. Then they should have told me that first.

> There's one called accounting 110, it has to be combined with accounting 210 to be transferred. But did not take the 210 because a switch in my study from business to science so I stopped doing any accounting. So that three credit was not used in transfer. . . . So I've already spend my time and my money, a lot of money too, and getting nothing. On my transcript there's nothing about 110 but I still need that course for SFU and SFU says you don't have accounting 110 and I can't let you have the credit. I ended up taking it again in SFU and not getting really good marks. But that course was a condensed course in SFU. In colleges they spend 2 semesters for the course but in SFU they spend one semester.

As indicated in Table 25, half of the students who claimed they lost credit in the transfer process could not explain why credit loss occurred. Other frequent reasons for loss of credit included reduced weighting of credits by SFU and transfer of courses but not transfer of credits.

**Table 25. Specific Reasons Courses were not Transferable**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| Unknown | 50 |
| DC credits weighted less at SFU | 25 |
| Course transferred, but credit wasn't (000 designation) | 25 |
| Pre-requisites required for transferable courses | 15 |
| Aware that some courses wouldn't be transferable | 15 |
| Needed more than one level of course to be transferable | 10 |
| No equivalent course at SFU for DC credits | 5 |
| Courses for original program not transferable to new program | 5 |
| Require courses full; had to take electives irrelevant to program | 5 |
| DC course not relevant to SFU program | 5 |

n=20

To illustrate students' perceived experiences with transferability of credits, their comments are quoted at length.

*Credits simply not transferable:*

> We had been told by the head guy in the PE Department that it doesn't matter where you go, it's all going to be the same. So you get that assumption that it doesn't matter what course you take, they're all going to transfer. . . I probably took my two years worth at Douglas College so I assumed that was basically going to be finished my two years of PE so I could come here and do, like third level, right, or 300 level or whatever. And I got here, and I have to do other ones and you know, it just, it seems like some of them are similar to the ones at Douglas, but they're not, you know, exactly the same. So they, you don't give me the credit for it. So it's really a, bad, like. I was really disappointed. It's a set-back.

> The communications one like writing resumes and there wasn't one like that . . . [at SFU], not even an elective, so that sucked but. . . .I was really surprised. . . The communications one I was really shocked that it wasn't [transferable] because it was a big line to take at Douglas. Everyone had to take this communication.

*Triple 000s:*

> I had taken one business and one math that weren't transferable specifically but they were credits towards business, or towards math and they transfer those as [triple zeros].

> I have one history course I took at Douglas and I believe it was BC history. That did not transfer over, it was 000 and I thought "Okay." But I got my transfer credit that was all that mattered but when I went to change my major to history and my minor to Spanish and they were asking me "What have you taken, what have you not taken?" I said "I have the history courses that are 000". She said "Do you know what level they were?" I thought no because I took them at, one of them was a 200 at Douglas but over here I didn't know if it would be a 100 level or a 200 level course.

*Less credit weight assigned:*

> I didn't get credit for everything. One of the courses I took wasn't transferable [marketing]. . . . then some of them were worth less. There was one course, biology, it was a really hard course and Douglas assigned 5 credits but there it's only 4 credits. . . It was a really hard course so I thought it would be the same amount.

*Level of course reduced in the transfer process:*

> I took this psych course which is a 200 level and it's only a 100 level here [at SFU] . . . Sometimes you take a 300 level course here and when you transfer it here, it's a 200 level course. So it wouldn't count as an upper division.

> I think I got credit for almost everything except for History of the British novel which I took at Douglas and English 313, 318 at Douglas. I got a credit but I didn't get a course assignment for it. . . . Well one of them I was given a 000, they're both 300 level at Douglas college, English 313 and English 319 which is basically 200 level and they knocked one down to a 100 level course. I think it was the introduction to drama. That was the equivalent of English 315.

*Lack of full complement of courses (prerequisites) required:*

> Psychology. It was a 300 level at Douglas and SFU but I just got 3 credits for it. They didn't directly transfer it because you needed two prerequisites for it. . . . In the Douglas calendar it said you only needed one of them to transfer to SFU. So I had that one and I needed two and they made a mistake in the calendar. That's why I only got [3 credits].

As these comments illustrate, for most students, the loss of a few credits was an annoyance. For others, the associated financial and temporal loss resulted in anger. Only one student described the transfer process into the Theatre Arts Program at SFU as particularly onerous. Her comments follow:

> Only one has transferred; the rest I have to work on. They transferred it general credit and I know that I can get credit for certain ones but it's a process. See English 199, that's the one that has an automatic transfer. So only one has it, yes. The rest of them I have to work for. . . .What I found out was I have to go and get my transcripts from Douglas. I have to go and get course descriptions from each of the instructors. I have to bring them to SFU to the departments that I want the transfers from and I have to apply. Regardless of whether or not someone else and lots of people transferred from the theatre program from Douglas into SFU. Regardless of whether or not they took the same ones. Which is why I haven't done it yet. I do have not that kind of time. It hasn't been a priority yet. . . . I went to Admissions and I went to the counselling area, or whatever that area is that deals with issues like this. It might be records or something, I don't know. One of those areas, I went to them and I got these answers from them. It was too much work for what I was prepared to do at the time.

The Theatre Arts Program appears to be an unarticulated program at SFU, which in terms of transfer arrangements, is not typical.

***Criteria for Transferring Credit***

Table 26 indicates that approximately one third of interviewees specified that they encountered difficulties with the criteria for transferring credits. These difficulties are listed in Table 27. Again, the most frequent problem cited was lack of clarity about which courses were selected for transfer, followed by a perception that they were not able to negotiate which credits could be transferred.

**Table 26. Difficulty with Criteria for Transferring Credits**

| | % |
|---|---|
| No | 67 |
| Yes | 33 |

n=39

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**Table 27. Specific Difficulties Related to the Criteria for Credit Transfer**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| Unsure which courses were selected for transfer | 36 |
| No say in what was transferred | 27 |
| Courses needed for program were not transferred | 9 |
| Frustration about DC marks not being recognized | 9 |
| Two levels of courses needed | 9 |
| No equivalent at SFU | 9 |

n=11

Two other issues around the topic of credit transfer raised during the interviews were the lack of knowledge that one could be admitted into the institution but not the desired program and the need to take placement tests in order to be admitted into some programs at SFU (*e.g.*, French). The following comments highlight these issues.

> I thought I would get into SFU and that's it but later I found out I have to apply for the business faculty. Some of the courses I had to finish taking and then I could apply. That's after I get into SFU. . . I sort of know there were courses I had to take but I didn't know there were a couple more and I still have to maintain my GPA. Cause actually right now I'm not in a faculty right now because I couldn't meet the requirement.

> I never understood that. . . . I applied to SFU wanting to be a crim. student but now I got into the school, but my GPA is not good enough to get into the crim. program? And I don't know. It was never set out for me. . . . And now I don't know what to do. I'm panicking now.

> When I went to [the Douglas College Advisor and] she saw I had taken a lot of crim. and I had said that was my intended major. . . . And I understood it was a separate thing but I didn't realize it was like applying over again. That you could get totally denied. . . [The GPA] was so much higher than what it was just to get into actual school. Otherwise I would have stayed at Douglas and got my other courses cheaper.

### *Transfer Involving a Third Institution*

Five individuals indicated that a third institution was involved in the transfer process. Four of the five also indicated that they encountered problems transferring credit from the third institution. Problems identified included the following: SFU did not recognize third institution credits; Douglas did not recognize third institution credits; neither SFU nor Douglas recognized third institution credits; credits were recognized but marks were not; difficulty in obtaining transcripts from previous institutions; courses from the third institution transferred to Douglas College, but not directly to SFU; and complicated foreign transfer. Students' words explicate these difficulties:

> When I went to Kwantlen and to Douglas and then Douglas to SFU, I was hoping I could just transfer my things from Kwantlen to Douglas and then I could just transfer the whole bunch from Douglas to SFU, but at SFU they said "No, you have to go back to Kwantlen get your transcripts and send them here." So I had to go to Douglas and Kwantlen and send them a transcript. You know, there's usually line-ups and it's a real hassle to get them sometimes and to get them on time and stuff. So I was. I, you know, I had no idea or else I would have never transferred them to Douglas in the first place, right? But.

> I was in my third year of university [in the Philippines]. [SFU] was asking for a complete description of my courses but my school didn't send it to them. Up to my third year, all the books that I've used, how the courses were taught. . . My school said there's "no way I'm going to do that for you." [SFU] said the best thing for you was to apply to community college.

> What I do have from Selkirk College that isn't on my transcript is social service work. I took a social service worker diploma program in 1989 . . . None of the courses that I took for that program are transferable anywhere but the University of Victoria. I think even the psychology was, as a credit, but there are others I don't see on here. I have another sociology.

### *Financial Aid and Scholarships*

Thirty percent of interviewees indicated that they had sought financial aid to assist with the costs of a university education. Sixty-three percent sought aid in the form of a student loan and 38% applied for a scholarship (the same student could have applied for both types of aid). As the comments illustrate, most students did not encounter problems in obtaining financial aid.

> [I had a] student loan at Douglas and then when I went to SFU I changed my account.
>
> It was just a matter of filling out the paper work.
>
> I had applied for a student loan when I first started [community college] and it was refused. . . . So when I applied to come [to SFU] and I'm going to apply for a student loan 'cause I can't afford to come here if I don't get one. Even if they just paid my tuition, that's all I care about. You know, I can live, you know, below the poverty line if I have to. But, as long as I have the tuition and my books. And I was surprised, they came back and they gave me the maximum. So I was really pleased and surprised.

However, four individuals reported having difficulty with obtaining financial aid. Reasons for difficulty included low GPA, lack of clarity about criteria for certain scholarships, and inability to obtain financial aid because they employed when they applied for assistance. Some of the comments about the difficulties students experience are as follows:

> I tried to apply for the entrance scholarship, but my GPA rate was too low, that I been rejected. . . . They told me that the entrance, that the cut-off point for the entrance scholarship is 3.95, well that's pretty high though. So.

One student's comments reflected her experience in attempting to apply for a scholarship:

> The only thing that was unclear was that I applied for a scholarship and said on the form, first of all the scholarship was for people entering in college. It said on the form if you do not qualify, you may qualify for this other scholarship. An open scholarship from SFU and I found out later that the only way you could qualify for it was if you already had 30 credits from SFU. It was really odd that why would that would be written on a form for people transferring from college. . . . I didn't actually find out I didn't qualify until I phoned and he said you can't qualify for this because you don't have credits from SFU. I said it never said that on the form.

***Attending SFU and Douglas College Concurrently***

Eight individuals indicated that they were attending Douglas College and SFU concurrently. The following reasons for dual attendance were provided: grade requirements were lower at Douglas College; courses were full at SFU; Douglas College was closer than SFU; yet unearned

prerequisites were required; dual registration resulted in an easier transition between Douglas College and SFU; and Douglas College courses were easier.

> I'm now a business student, I need to take some accounting courses and for some courses in Douglas College, they are not equivalent to another, well, three credit hour course in SFU so I have changed my mind several times, at the beginning of, well I used to plan taking accounting, one of the accounting courses, but later I know that I need two accounting courses in order to get transferred to SFU as one accounting course, so that's why I dropped that course in the very beginning of my first semester in Douglas and also because I am also a late registration, I came here, well, December 1995, so it is quite late for me to register at Douglas, so I need to apply, well do the late registration. So I couldn't get my last course, the fifth course at the very last moment.

> It helps for me to gain a higher GPA because we only need a C or more in colleges but at SFU you have to maintain your GPA to get into whatever faculty you want. I know English isn't my first language and this is a philosophy course and I know I wouldn't do as well in SFU as I would in Douglas so that's why I took it in Douglas 'cause all you need is a C or more.

Five of the eight students maintained that simultaneous attendance at two institutions was not problematic. The remaining three individuals identified several problems, including difficulty obtaining financial aid, difficulty registering at SFU and, as the following quote illustrates, constructing a schedule that was too demanding.

> I had an excellent GPA from Douglas, I think it was 3.46 or 3.54 or something like that, but there was no problem, they gave me a conditional admission to the faculty when I first got here, but I did make big mistakes in the first courses that I took here. I, like I said, I was really trying shoot through, so I took, I think two courses at Douglas and then three courses here [at SFU] in the same semester. . . plus some of the courses were at Harbour Centre for SFU and some were here.

***Registration at SFU***

Registration at SFU was deemed to be problematic by 60% of the individuals in this study (Table 28). Two major problems with registration identified included a late appointment date for registration and problems enrolling in courses. As the comments illustrate, a late registration appointment resulted in a limited choice of courses.

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**Table 28. Difficulties with Course Registration at SFU**

| | % |
|---|---|
| No | 40 |
| Yes | 60 |

n=44

**Table 29. Specific Difficulties Related to Course Registration**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| Given late appointment for course registration | 52 |
| Couldn't get into courses | 48 |
| Called constantly to get through to Telereg | 8 |
| GPA and program year controlled registration | 8 |
| Deregistered from a course because of actual or assumed lack of prerequisite | 8 |
| Got courses at undesired times | 8 |
| Unclear information about registration at SFU | 8 |

n=25

Students' comments help to illustrate the problems encountered in the registration process:

> I guess when I came here I was going to Douglas at the same time and you have to sign or get some sort of permission to take classes elsewhere while you're at SFU. So they said that's fine, you can take classes elsewhere as long as you get the credits transferred here when you're finished. So I had always done that but they had neglected to check my credits from Douglas college so they dropped me from that class. It was a hassle getting back. It happened actually twice, in the summer and the fall.

> I'm so depressed actually because in Douglas it seemed that all the courses I wanted to take, they're always full and it's so hard, the calendar to try and get in and it's so hard. The class itself is limited to a number of people. It's hard to get in. Here it's bigger classes but at the same time it's hard to get in. I don't know. I've tried several times for two courses. They were full. I couldn't register.

> It's not a fun process. Yea, it's really hard to get into classes. . . . I was talking to one of my TAs and she said it was based on GPA, but somebody else also said it was the time you spent in the school, the combination of the two. So if you hadn't been here before you're further down the line and if you've got a lower GPA you're even further down the line. So it just depends. So obviously the longer you spend in school, the better the grades you get, the higher you go up in the totem pole.
>
> The phone system is a good idea. I'm, I think they work it out, where it's a blend between your GPA and how long you've been in the school, is what gives you your, the time period in which you could register. I'm not really sure. So that was kinda tough for me in the beginning because, I didn't do my first years at SFU, I had a late student number, so I registered kinda late. I really haven't had any problems with the earlier business courses, they were, there's like 200 and something people in those courses.
>
> When I first knew I got into SFU it was late because everybody got registered already. The register process begins early and when I received my letter it was almost the beginning of the semester so most of the courses are full and so I wasn't able to get into the courses I want to. So I ended up taking some of the other electives.
>
> When I first semester there was some courses I wanted and couldn't get into. They were full but I think that's typical, you can't always get all the courses you want.
>
> In the summer there was no problem cause I just took two classes and then, but what I found in the fall. It was hard. Cause like I couldn't cause I couldn't get what I wanted. . . . I guess class sizes were full and everything, like. 'Cause in Kinesiology, it's really really hard to get into classes, especially if you're you know, first or second year.
>
> Basically, [courses] were all full because, how. Cause I was at the bottom of the list, right? . . . You know how seniority wise, I guess like as a student, like the first year students are going to get last pick. Like they're going to have like, they're going to get a later date to register.

***Transfer as a Mystifying Process***

As reported earlier, several students described the transfer process as "a breeze." In fact, eight individuals (17%) reported that they did not have difficulties with any of the following: gaining admission to SFU, transferring courses, or registering for classes at SFU. Only three individuals (6%) claimed to have difficulty with all of these dimensions of transfer. The remaining 78% experienced difficulties with one or two of these dimensions. However, regardless of the degree of difficulty encountered by individuals, there was an overriding sense that most students were mystified by some aspect of the transfer process. Although most of the following comments

could be incorporated into other parts of the report, it is useful to consider them under the rubric of transfer as a mystifying process.

> I know they left off some of my better grades and took some of the lower grades. . . . I had no say, like, you know I just gave them my transcript and when they got back to me about getting into the school, they showed me what courses got transferred.

> Before, I had to get my transcripts done and the transfers were hard to understand. I just thought they were your grades on your report card. I had to go back and forth so many times until I understood what transcripts were. They were official documents that had to be sent. That was confusing. I had to keep going back and forth.

> The minimum required credit to transfer and when I considered those, the question in my mind is when could I transfer, how could I transfer and these two questions. So one question I just concerned with the credit hours minimum for me to transfer then I look through all the calendar and I find it's 24 credit hours. There is so many type of admission. If you get under that the university will see your grade 12 marks. If you're over that but not up to 24 I don't know what they do with it. If you achieve 24 credit they just look at your college. Then I try to think how they see the GPA. If the just look at my college grades and not high school grades, it's a different thing. Have to consider whether the more credit I have, when I enter will the requirement of GPA be lower. So I have to consider that too.

> I find it frustrating for reading the calendar, for some people. It's so confusing. The rules and the details. What course and what course count as what requirement, what category of requirement.

> That was one thing about the transfer part that was, I didn't know, I didn't understand that when I was finally was admitted, it was probably June of 96 and if I wanted to apply to the faculty I would have had to have my application in by May. With no way I could apply to the faculty so my first semester here was a lost semester *per se* cause nothing, I couldn't do lower level that applied to my degree. I already have all of them so I just had to wait to get into the upper level.

That the process of transfer is mystifying to students concurs with the findings of Gaylord, Ducharme & Associates (1996). An analysis of open ended comments on the *Study Outcomes Survey* revealed that "students generally appeared to have only a limited grasp of 'the big picture' and their comments often betrayed their confusion" (p.19).

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## D. Experiences After Transfer

The body of research on transfer indicates that transfer problems do not end after the act of transferring is completed. Two potential problems identified by Dougherty (1987) – a decline in grades after transfer and integration into the receiving institution – are featured in this section of the paper.

### *Changes in Grade Point Average After Transfer*

When asked whether their grade point averages had changed following transfer to university, one student's response – "Yea, you betcha!" – appeared to capture the sentiments many of the interviewees. A full 73% indicated that their grades had dropped after transfer to SFU. However, 16% reported that their grades stayed the same and 11% claimed their grades were higher (Table 30).

**Table 30. Students Experienced a Post-transfer GPA change**

| | % |
|---|---|
| Same | 16 |
| Lower | 73 |
| Higher | 11 |

n=44

Examples of students' comments accentuate all three scenarios.

> I freaked out. My first semester was so tough. It was such an extreme from college.
>
> [My grades] went down It was horrible.
>
> I would say [my grades are] similar. A lot of people were telling me actually to expect them to be a little more difficult here at SFU. And in all sincerity, I don't find that at all.
>
> [My grades are] a little higher because you have to work a little harder. You want to finish your degree so. You want to get a good mark. You don't want to be the bottom half. Try and be on the top.

Reasons for a decline in grades are summarized in Table 31 under the following headings: general institutional, classroom, course content, individual, and professors/teaching assistants.

**Table 31. Reasons for Post-transfer Decline in GPA**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| **General Institutional** | |
| Marking system at SFU (*i.e.*, the bell curve) | 43 |
| SFU more academically demanding | 36 |
| Student quality better/competitive | 21 |
| Acclimatization to a large institution | 11 |
| Less peer support | 7 |
| More independence required at SFU | 7 |
| **Classroom** | |
| Larger classes | 43 |
| Less class time (1hr less per needed course) | 14 |
| Less individualized attention | 11 |
| Less discussion in class at SFU | 7 |
| Classes less structured at SFU | 7 |
| **Course Content** | |
| More difficult/heavier course work at SFU | 29 |
| Exams/ papers harder | 18 |
| Course work more abstract | 4 |
| **Individual** | |
| Did not work as hard at SFU as at DC | 7 |
| Lack of focus by student | 7 |
| Taking too many courses | 4 |
| Expected to happen in the process of adjusting to SFU | 4 |
| Study habits developed for DC inappropriate at SFU | 4 |
| **Professors/TAs** | |
| Limited contact with actual instructor at SFU | 29 |
| Uncaring instructors | 4 |
| Professors focus is research not teaching at SFU | 4 |
| Professors overeducated | 4 |
| Class time split between professors and TAs | 4 |
| TAs do not speak English (well) | 4 |
| Subject matter knowledge of TAs limited | 4 |
| Discrepancies between what professors and TAs taught | 4 |
| Difficulty with TA system | 4 |

n=28

Under the heading "general institutional," two factors – increased academic rigour and the marking system (in particular employment of the bell curve system) were most frequently implicated as being responsible for declining grades.

> I wasn't expecting that it was going to be that different 'cause when I was back in Douglas College, it was hard for me and I thought, the instructors kept saying "you might think I'm hard on you marking paper but I'm just preparing you for university." And I'm like well I thought it was going to very similar to that so well I survived and it was going to be similar here but it's harder here because you have less access to people, like instructors. . . the classes are bigger too.

> I don't understand the marking scheme. They mark on a bell curve or normal curve and I don't understand that. I had no idea what they were talking about, like normal curve. They would talk to you the first day, "well this is how I'm going to mark a normal curve." I had no idea. No one told me. I asked academic advisors what a normal curve is. Why was I being marked on a normal curve? That's the way it is. That's not enough answer. Until now I still have no idea [about] the marking.

> I think it's because of the grade curve. There's a system like the bell curve. You can get 75% and get a D or an F. I put in more work. It was probably the hardest course I ever took which was calculus. I took that at SFU and I know from the same amount of work. At the end of the semester I was so confident that I was going to pass the test and I actually got a D. I thought I did pretty good. I thought I knew everything about calculus. . . . There were a lot of people in the class. We don't have a bell curve at Douglas. You get a certain percent and then you get the grade.

> It's definitely because of the curve and it's the type of students you're dealing with when you come up here. When you're down at college, like I mean college students are very bright, very smart students but you get a lot of students that slack off because it's college. Up here it seems to me that very few people slack off. It's a very serious school up here. You can tell just from the atmosphere that it's very serious.

At the classroom level, students most frequently attributed lower GPAs to large classes and decreased class time.

> You have to do a lot more work at university. You have to study more. It's harder. . . I think they expect more of you. You have to read more. The tests are harder. I think they mark the papers harder too.

> The instruction as far as the classroom sizes because lectures are a lot bigger here and you got tutorials right? Which I personally don't like because at college it's like you've got your lecture and you stay with those same people. the classes aren't that big. 40 to 50 people max. You're allowed to ask questions in class and stuff. here in lectures it's like once in a blue moon you can ask a question because it feels very intimidating. Unless you get into tutorials. Then you got the question of everybody has a different TA. So that varies too because sometimes you can fluke out and get a good TA or sometimes you can get a bad TA.
>
> There was this math course. I was doing well before the final exam and the final exam I didn't do too good but I still think I can get a pretty good grade because average is around, not too bad but it turn out I get pretty bad grade. I went to talk to instructor and ask her what percentage is what grade and she told me that 96 percent is an A and then I understand why my grade so low. My percentage of that course not so low but compared to other people make me. I find that system poor.
>
> You can get some [classes] that are usually around 100 and something students. Yea; second year are 200 something, but third year about 100 and something. I think it gets smaller when you get to fourth year. But they're still very big. Like there were a couple of classes I had in my first semester where you did the tutorial which is one hour a week when you have a class of about 30. But I had two cases where my TA's didn't even speak English. Like it was very . . . they were very limited in their English.
>
> I think the first semester up here I think I was overwhelmed by the amount of work and the lectures are split up into, I only get an hour of lecture every two days, like for history or whatever, and last year at Douglas we participated when the professor was lecturing. Now, you just sit there and take your notes and then you go to tutorial and depending on how the tutorial is run you participate or you don't participate. . . .The topics that are covered in the tutorials. I couldn't see how relevant they were to what the professor was talking about in lecture. Yea that threw me. Really threw me.

Course content was deemed by 30% of interviewees to be more difficult. Also, exams were considered more difficult and course assignments were described as more abstract.

> I had more hands on experience at Douglas I found. For my psychology courses we worked at Riverview and that's something you could never do up here because there is too many people. So there's a lot more theory involved.
>
> The expectation is a bit higher here at SFU. For the exams, the midterms and the finals are definitely harder. . . . Harder, in several senses is, because the lecture room is so big you're not likely to ask a question if you have some problem understanding the material. The prof. usually wants to cover a specific amount of material in that time and so you don't sense they want to stop and answer your question. So that factor plus the big class, you don't really want to stop the class either so in that sense you're not listening and concentrating as much. . . . I say for me it was poor. Poorer.

A few individuals directed the responsibility for lower achievement after transfer at themselves.



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> I lazy and I'm not very used to the way they teach.

More often, limited or unsatisfactory contact with professors and teaching system organized around professors and teaching assistants were associated with a drop in grades.

> I don't think the professors bring much of their personal experience into it: . . Profs work the book. A lot of that.

> They just expect a lot more. As far as the course work, it's pretty much the same but when it comes down to the nitty gritty on the test, they're a lot harder and the professors expect you to do the work on your own. They are available for help but, at Douglas it's almost like high school. The work is the same but it doesn't prepare you to do the work on your own because they hold your hand down there. Up here you gotta do it yourself.

> The instructor don't care as much as in Douglas College. In college the group is small so the instructor can pay more attention to individual. But in this university the class is so big so that the instructor can not pay much attention. So the work is mainly done, very responsible for the person who do the work.

> At Douglas the teachers are more approachable, the profs. here, I find are overeducated. I wouldn't want to ask them something because I'd feel like an idiot.

> I didn't even understand the whole thing, the lecture and tutorial. I didn't even know what a tutorial was. That kind of freaked me out. I just thought it would be more. The first day [at Douglas College] the teacher would say "this is Criminology 100, welcome my name is. . ." But [at SFU] it was just boom, he walked in, said this is your homework assignment and away we went.

Some students reported that they had since acquired skills and strategies to adapt to the teaching and learning experience offered by the university, including visiting an advisor at SFU, learning how "it works" at SFU then devising strategies for studying and coping with a bigger workload, improving their study habits, and reducing their course load. For some students, the result was an increased GPA.

> I'm taking only 3 courses this semester so I could boost [my GPA].

> [My GPA] is going up a bit now that I'm getting used to it. It was a really big switch though because I was used to the way I studied at Douglas. And it worked for me so now I had to change it all. My grades are going back up, I just had to get used to the new way of studying and bigger work load.

Students who reported that their grades had actually increased after transfer indicated that they had worked harder right from the beginning, changed their attitude upon admission to the university,

and were driven by wanting to earn good grades to get into a specific program. As one student stated:

> You have to work a little harder. You want to finish your degree so. You want to get a good mark. You don't want to be the bottom half. Try and be on the top. . . You try a little harder. Especially if you want to get a job at the end. The higher the GPA the better the chance you have.

Findings of a report completed by the SFU Office of Analytical Studies (Heslop, 1996) indicate that although the GPAs of transfer students from Douglas College decline by approximately half a percentage point during the first semester, their cumulative GPA improves by graduation.

### *Student Approval of Attending Douglas College Before Coming to SFU*

When asked whether they were pleased that they commenced their studies at Douglas College before attending SFU, the majority said "yes". Table 32 summarizes the reasons provided.

**Table 32. Specific Reasons for Approving of Going to Douglas College Before SFU**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| Good preparation that eased the transition | 44 |
| DC provided transition back into school | 28 |
| DC was harder than high school but not as hard as university | 17 |
| DC fostered the independent learning necessary for university | 11 |
| DC provided more hours per week with instructor than SFU | 11 |
| Opportunity to meet language requirements | 11 |
| DC was the place to decide what to do | 11 |

n=18

According to one student:

> I just think that if I had first graduated and come here [to SFU], I would have been really overwhelmed by it. I was a lot more afraid to speak out . . . . I don't think I would have been prepared for it. My high school was quite small and I would have found it overwhelming. I would have been lost. I'd been here before, visiting. I thought, "Oh, just go to Douglas" and I liked it.. Even that was, it was still al little bit scary but when I came here it was no big deal. Suddenly from the transfer. I didn't even think twice so I guess I got a lot more competent. It didn't seem as scary anymore.

Of the few who did not consider the Douglas College to SFU trajectory satisfactory, the following reasons were offered: Douglas College does not challenge students enough and Douglas College instructors are less informed about subject matter than SFU instructors.

Several respondents reported that they were happy to be attending SFU. However, a small proportion indicated that they would have preferred to have competed their degrees at Douglas College. A few claimed that their transfer was premature and that they should have earned all of their prequisites at Douglas College before transferring to university. Others commented that there was little difference between the two institutions.

The following comments highlight the figures in Table 32:

> Well the main reason I'm here and the biggest advantage is to complete a BA. Which I would have done at Douglas College if they had offered it. But they didn't. So that's about the only reason I had to come here. . . . I prefer the smaller classroom setting and the style at Douglas. . . . You get more individual attention here and they seem to encourage discussion more during class.

> Right now I wish I would of stayed at Douglas to get all of my requirements done and known what the GPA was to get into the crim. program. . . . I assumed once I got into the school, I would get my prereqs. out of the way and then boom I'd be in the criminology program. I didn't realize it was this hard.

> I will tell you that I would have preferred to do my whole four years at Douglas. And I'm sorry I had to transfer at all. I, you know. . . . Because it was such a great, you know, I loved going to Douglas.

> It's a little different atmosphere than it is there. It's a little more you're on your own. . . . I kind of like SFU a little better. . . I found it didn't offer exactly what I wanted more. It offered your standard first year science classes but there wasn't anything else.

### *Differences Between Douglas College and SFU*

Differences between Douglas College and SFU, as identified by interviewees, are summarized in Table 33. These differences and accompanying students' comments are very similar to the reasons for declines in grade point average reported in Table 31.

**Table 33. Specific Differences Between Douglas College and SFU**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| Smaller classes at DC | 38 |
| Interaction with instructors better at DC | 28 |
| SFU more impersonal | 23 |
| SFU has more demanding workload | 23 |
| Easier telereg system/registration system at SFU than DC | 18 |
| Instructors more attentive at DC | 18 |
| Different marking criteria in the two institutions | 13 |
| Better social life at DC | 10 |
| Little difference between DC & SFU | 10 |
| DC friendlier | 8 |
| More academic resources at SFU | 5 |
| More activities at SFU | 5 |
| More people at SFU (more friends) | 5 |
| More difficult to make friends and peer support at SFU | 3 |
| Classes smaller at SFU | 3 |
| Too many small assignments at DC | 3 |
| Much more stress at SFU | 3 |
| DC way too relaxed | 5 |
| Class time shorter at SFU | 3 |
| TA-professor split time over teaching | 3 |
| SFU "big"! | 3 |
| DC more flexible | 3 |
| Students not taken seriously at SFU | 3 |

n=40

Students' comments:

> I find the people who come from college, their participation is higher because we were really encouraged to talk during courses. And a lot of people at the university level are afraid to speak out. A lot of the early courses, the 100 level courses, are very big so you don't get a chance to talk so I don't think they're used to that.



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> [At] SFU . . . whenever you phone [to register for courses] there is no problem. You just get in. Where at Douglas you have to sit on the phone day and night. Sometimes it's so hard to get into the machine. When you do you register in a course and then overnight they drop you for some reason or other or technicality. At SFU they don't do that. You just register and that's it. You don't have to worry about it. The next day you're still registered.
>
> In Douglas you have to spend whole day and whole week [trying to register] . . . But in SFU because the class is bigger it's easier to get a course.
>
> My classes [at SFU] have been smaller, even than they were at Douglas. With the exception of my lower level arts class. Once you get into the upper level classes it's all really 15 to 20 people. I like it that way.
>
> There's not much differences between the colleges and universities. There wasn't much of a difference in going to classes there so plus the teaching styles are basically the same. Except in English they're different. Didn't make much of a difference. You just couldn't get a degree in colleges.
>
> SFU is relatively difficult because of the large size and in SFU we meet one hour less than well we used to meet in Douglas, a three credit course, normally just meet three hours in SFU but four hours in Douglas. So, normally two hours . . . at SFU in the whole bunch of peepholes, so they can't concentrate on what every single student and for tutorial, different instructor or TA teaches us and well, I do know how to say, it's not as good as one single instructor for all the course work. I personally think that.
>
> It's so big [at SFU]. . . . Coming here was vast, you know. This huge concrete everywhere and all these faceless students and nobody even looks at you or smiles at you. You know, everybody's in a rush and it was just overwhelming.

Table 34 and related comments summarize the recommendations provided by interviewees to improve the transfer process. These recommendations include more and improved information channels and resources, changes in policy, better liaison among institutions, improved advising, more proactiveness on the part of the student. Only 6% of respondents to this question indicated that no improvements were necessary.

**Table 34. Specific Recommendations About the Transfer Process**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| **Information** | |
| Information should be more forthcoming | 11 |
| DC instructors should talk about future 3rd and 4th year courses | 11 |
| DC needs to explain SFU better to students | 9 |
| Department fairs/workshops for transfer students | 9 |
| Have peers who have transferred speak with future transferees at DC | 6 |
| Inform prospective students about prerequisites/placement exams | 6 |
| More awareness of scholarships | 6 |
| Separate section in DC calendar for transfer students | 6 |
| More up to date information about transfer process | 3 |
| Better office hours for advisor / counsellors to accommodate to non-traditional students | 3 |
| More specific information about workload expectations at SFU | |
| Plenty of literature on the transfer process | 3 |
| More informed DC personnel | 3 |
| Clearer information handouts | 3 |
| **Policies** | |
| DC and SFU should work together re: course difficulty | 6 |
| Make course numbers the same at DC and SFU | 3 |
| Make DC courses harder | 3 |
| More organisational support for transfer at SFU | 3 |
| More weight given to DC grades | 3 |
| DC should be more like SFU | 3 |
| Make DC courses more like SFU courses | 3 |
| **Liaison among Institutions** | |
| More flexibility in the system e.g. be able to take courses at other universities also (*i.e.*, make transfer more universal) | 14 |
| More liaison among institutions | 11 |
| Transfer link between DC and SFU | 3 |
| More interaction between DC and SFU counsellors and advisors | 3 |
| **Advising** | |
| More guidance with the course planning process | 11 |
| Counsellors should be more knowledgeable/ helpful about transfer courses | 9 |
| Counsellors need to be up to date | 3 |
| **Student's Role** | |
| Students need to take active role in the transfer process | 31 |
| Use resources | 17 |
| Individual needs to do research in the process | 6 |
| Talk to instructors at both institutions | 6 |
| Take SFU orientation even though it is for 1st year students | 6 |
| **No Problems** | |
| Nothing - everything is in place | 6 |

n=35

Students provided lengthy commentary about possible recommendations for improvement.

*Information*

> Back in Douglas they wouldn't really tell you what SFU is about or how different it is. They say basically that . . . [it] is different and you have no idea.

> Letting the students know this is what you need to do. Giving out everything. "This is what it's going to be like. This is what you should take, you should make sure that this is this." Just planning out everything. Giving you everything that you need to know.

*Policies*

> Well I think that your grade should weigh more from Douglas coming to SFU. For sure, cause I worked my butt off for that and then to hear it counted for nothing and, I mean, it wasn't even really told to me that that's the method or the way it works and I think it's kinda kept quite.

> The requirements for the UBC social work program are entirely different than the UCFV are as well as UNBC and all the other programs. . . . Well, that's a huge obstacle. Because not only for me, but I have several friends that ended up now back a third year at college, picking up courses because they had followed one program and now, they've you know, decided to attend another institution and they can't. They have to pick up you know, another pre-reqs and it's a real hassle, it's extra money, because you've got to take out your student loan for that year, its another year, you know, you're a year behind in your studies, its very frustrating for students. And I know when I was working with the student society, that was probably one of our number one complaints from students. Was their transferability of the courses and the course requirements for, you know, for the different ones. So that's something to flag for sure.

> Either standardize . . . which courses, like even, well even like different colleges, they have different courses, you know, so, there's got to be a way to standardize everything to make it so everything is transferable everywhere. Or at least tell you, you know, have someone to tell you rather than you guessing.

*Liaison among Institutions*

> I think maybe if the counselors could be more helpful and maybe if they talk to each other between, I think they do that but it seemed like the college ones were a bit behind in the changes in university and if they kept up on that it would really help the students because they don't know. They rely on what the counsellors tell them.

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*Advising*

> Yes, information. That is many of my friends come directly out of high school and come to Douglas college. They don't know what to do. How to plan there course of study. I think it is also their responsibility but also to have some kind of guideline to help them. To guide them through the course planning process.
>
> I went to them several times [to counsellors at Douglas College and SFU and] actually and nobody could help me. I was quite upset. I think they should of explained it more clearly in the beginning.

*The Student's Role*

> Ask a lot of questions, you know. Find out what you're in for before you want to transfer. If you know you're going to transfer to a university. You know which program, you have an idea, find out what courses you need. You know. Find out what the transfer process is. Get some counselling. You know. Look into the Catalogue. Find out which courses are transferable, cause there's nothing more frustrating than taking a course and finding out it's not transferable. You know.

*No Problems*

> There's not much more they can do. They made it as easy as possible. It's up to the person. It depends on where he wants to go. Depends on what courses he takes. He can get a little help from them. They can help you with courses that are transferable, ones which aren't transferable. Which would be at your best benefit to take at college and which at university.
>
> They're doing their best. SFU puts out a paper for all colleges. All the transferable courses at the different colleges. Every year I think. Plus they have, for the faculties, which courses you have to take before you can apply. So they have the equivalent at the colleges too. So they try and help you. Which courses you can take at college so you can apply straight into the faculty. They try their best.

Interviewees were asked to comment on the advantages and disadvantages of transfer. In Table 35, the advantages offered by students are listed. Forty percent commented that by beginning at a community college, the transition to university was easier. Lower cost and the virtues of a small institution were reported to be advantages by 30% of respondents.

**Table 35. Specific Advantages of Transfer**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| Easier transition to university | 39 |
| Financially less expensive | 29 |
| Easier to start at smaller institution | 29 |
| Interaction with instructors at DC beneficial down the road | 16 |
| Chance to raise marks | 10 |
| Small class size | 7 |
| Geographic location | 7 |
| Fresh start from poor DC marks | 7 |
| Opportunity to figure out what to do | 7 |
| TOEFL not required for college entrance | 3 |
| Can take harder courses in college first | 3 |
| Learn to spread out more in university because of community college experience | 3 |
| Good bridge after being out of school for a long time | 3 |
| Prerequisites for admission not necessary (e.g., French) | 3 |
| Broadened horizons by being exposed to different systems | 3 |

n=31

Advantages of transfer were described as follows:

> For Douglas College, class sizes are significantly smaller, there are a maximum of 35 people per class, so the Instructor can concentrate a lot on every student's personal or academic needs and, maybe because of that course work seemed to be easier. I don't know whether that reflects the actual situation, but because of the small size of the class, I guess it's easier, the course [inaudible] speaking.

> Some of the courses like the ones I have in Douglas are harder, you can take those ones [at Douglas College] first and then take the easier ones here. Boost up my GPA and get into the faculty. The [dis]advantage is that if you've done the harder ones in colleges then how are you going to face the competition up here?

> Well, the big advantage first of all is financially. It's cheaper to go to, well, it depends which kind of institution you're talking about. If you're talking about college, like Douglas College is cheaper, than SFU. Yea. So that's a big advantage for me. The location. You know, there's a lot more little colleges around, whether it's Kwantlen, Douglas, yea. Campuses, exactly. For me it's not bad. But it's still closer to go to Douglas than it is to SFU. So that's one thing.

> The advantages I think you get the interaction with the teachers at the college and a different experience and I think I benefited a lot by that. Especially early 100 level course where you need that extra attention. And that really helped me, especially for university writing and English course. I had a lot of trouble in that right out of high school. I didn't know how to write university papers. The teacher was really good and she helped me a lot with my writing. We went over it with our classmates and marked each other's papers. That was something I really needed.

> I think if I'd come from high school, there's no way I'd still be here. I would have dropped out for sure.
>
> Cheaper then university is so it makes financial sense to go to college before you go to university. You gotta do two years and you can do it at college or university. Cheaper to do it in college. Cause it's the same thing, right?
>
> I think that the advantage was that it's more of a learning step coming from college to university. You get a little more adjusted rather than an initial whack in the head.
>
> [By transferring], I think that you get to see the real world more. I've gone through a lot of different jobs, in a lot of different areas and it's the same way. If I could and we go somewhere else, I'll transfer again. Because it's fascinating to see the different places, different ways of studying or thinking or of whatever and SFU communications department is somewhat left and most of the university is somewhat right I believe. Just seeing those dynamics going on and watching profs. or instructors elsewhere spin their webs at their own places of employment is fascinating.

Several disadvantages to transfer were also specified (Table 36). The most frequent disadvantages cited included adapting to the teaching and learning styles at two different institutions and learning to study for two different institutions. The need to take courses that are transferable – perceive as something university students who enter directly are never confronted with – and the time spent "processing" in relation to transfer were also mentioned.

**Table 36. Specific Disadvantages of Transfer**

| | % of cases |
|---|---|
| Teaching/learning styles of teachers/students so different at each institution | 29 |
| Having to learn how to study for 2 different systems -always in a state of learning to adapt | 24 |
| Transfer students have to spend time in courses that are transferable | 14 |
| Need to have an idea of what to expect | 14 |
| Arrived too late at SFU to enrol in co-op program | 10 |
| Took unnecessary courses at DC because of registration problems | 10 |
| Lose good marks from DC in transfer process | 10 |
| Waste time "processing" / doing the procedures | 5 |
| Less latitude in courses that are not transferable | 5 |
| Waste of time when courses are not transferable | 5 |
| Fragmented studies | 5 |
| Harder for transfer student to get into desired program | 5 |

n=21



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Students specified the following about the disadvantages associated with transfer:

> Time, people consider the time very much, they want to have everything fast and regular so if you transfer to college to transfer to university, sometimes they have procedure or something . Some time you have to waste it in processing, doing the procedure thing, other than just direct from high school to university.
>
> You have to spend time in those courses which are transferable. But for the university students they don't have to spend time thinking about that about those courses that can transfer to other institution. To spend much time talking with someone, thinking about it, what can transfer.
>
> Disadvantages, you have to adjust again once you get to a place. You're put in another situation where you have to learn the whole system again.
>
> Because . . . I was transferring to a university so well that's meaningless . . . pointless for me to take courses that are not transferrable.
>
> I think the shock of the different learning and studying techniques was hard. a year and a half later I'm still getting used to the differences because I was so used to the way I studied at Douglas. I got used to the easy method but I think if I went right from high school it would have been easier on me. I would of been used to – oh, this is such a hard course – I would have to study every night rather then saving it before the exam.
>
> I think college was way to relaxed. Way too relaxed. The ways the exams were, the easiness of the exams and these are just brutal. At Douglas, final were 20 percent and now I've got finals worth 50 percent. That's a big difference.
>
> [Douglas College] didn't give me any study skills. There was just not the pressure there is on me now. All of a sudden I've gone from working but not having it consume all my time and now it literally is all I do. I'm still barely getting by.
>
> Of course you tend to be a bit of a mutt. You never connect in the same way but as a mature student. I'm never going to have the university experience my husband had or somebody else had and I wouldn't of had it then anyway. The problem is that you don't have a clean package. It's a strange one compared. It's like having 6 different jobs and they're looking for somebody long term.

***Examples of "Playing the System"***

Finally, although not quantifiable, several students commented on how they learned to "play the system" – for example, by applying for admission summer session, applying repeatedly to a program with the hope of being accepted when the admission GPA was lower for a given intake

period, or challenging the official admission process by enlisting the support of powerful personnel such as academic advisors.

*Applying for Summer Admission*

> People told me it was easier to transfer in the summer. . . . They said it was easier to get in the summer. So I did.

*Repeat Applications*

> They depend on the average of the people that apply. You have a lot of people applying and their average is around 3, they'll raise the GPA to 3. If it's 2.75, they'll put it at 2.75.

*Clarifying Admission Status*

> I did apply in the spring semester, my last semester at Douglas College. I came up near the end of that semester and that's when I put the application in. So. Yea. Anyway, so then they sent me the thing saying I was accepted. However, I didn't get into the program that I had, I had requested to get into History and it came back "intended", not "accepted". . . . So that was a bit of a, you know, oh dear. I'm not getting any classes now. So, I phoned an Academic Advisor, a History Academic Advisor up here and spoke to her about it and she put me in. I guess they are all powerful. . . . They accepted me to the university, but not to the program I had requested. . . . So [the Academic Advisor] had said well I don't see any reason why they didn't let you in, so she did. And so that's how I ended up in the department I wanted, which was great because then the history courses opened up for me, as first choice. Which was really helpful.

## V. Discussion and Recommendations

An overall impression of the interviews is discussed in the following four sections: a general profile of the students and their accounts of the transfer experience; a review of some specific transfer difficulties; and a discussion of the prevalence of post-transfer decline in GPA; and advantages and disadvantages of transfer.

### A General Profile of Students and their Accounts of the Transfer Experience

A total of 47 interviews were carried out. More females than males participated in this study, and most students proceeded in a fairly direct line from high school to college to university. Most interviewees reported that they commenced their studies at a community college with the intention to transfer to university, and SFU was most frequently identified as the target university in mind. Most students knew exactly what program they wanted to enter from the beginning; a few others had changed their minds along the way. The most commonly cited program areas in which students specialized were general studies, business administration, and sciences. However, eight other program areas were identified.

Respondents gave a number of reasons for commencing their post-secondary studies at a community college first then transferring to university, rather than entering university directly. They often spoke of college as a "stepping stone" to university, a way of easing out of high school before hitting the rigours of university life. They described the move straight from high school to university as too big a step. Several respondents said that if they had started at university right away they "never would have made it" or wouldn't have been ready. College provided a way to test the waters, to become acclimatized and explore different options in an environment which many students described as being smaller, friendlier, and more supportive than university. Some students attributed their decision to start at a community college to the financial incentive of lower tuition rates. Others said that since community college was reputed to be easier, it was a good way to embark on a post-secondary career with better chances of a higher GPA, which in turn would stand

them in good stead to get into their desired program area when it came time to transfer to university. For some students, entering into university directly from high school was not an option because their secondary school marks were not good enough. College provided them an opportunity to raise their GPA and gain a second chance for university admission. A number of respondents who were immigrants to Canada and spoke English as a second language said that they were not qualified for university admission unless they satisfied a mandatory (for universities) language test requirement (the TOEFL). College was a way to get started on their post-secondary education until such time as they passed the TOEFL; then they could transfer their college credits to their university studies. For these students, college functioned as a kind of "holding tank" until they achieved the necessary TOEFL score (which often took several attempts to obtain a high enough score) and were deemed admissible to university. For some, this strategy appeared to work quite well. Others, especially those with a high GPA and a clear area of desired speciality, spoke of being held back by this requirement, having to spend extra time and money on college courses that didn't exactly suit their interests, and allowing other students who didn't face the same TOEFL road block a head start.

Because many of the respondents attended community college with the intention to transfer at some later date, they usually spoke of planning their college course schedule accordingly. Students were usually very attentive to the question of transferability, and were careful to take courses that they knew were transferable to university. Some students spoke of this process as being quite straightforward, simply a matter of reading the Douglas college calendar, and adhering to what the available information indicated was transferable and what was not. Others said that it was very complicated and confusing. The available information was insufficiently clear; it was hard to work out an acceptable schedule that satisfied the necessary transfer requirements (ensuring that all prerequisites were accounted for, and that the sometimes necessary "companion" courses could be or had been accommodated); it was hard to know whether the information was current, to understand what it meant, or what aspects of it were most pertinent. Some students said that talking to academic advisors at Douglas College was helpful, and others said it was a waste of time, or that the advisors' advice was wrong or untrustworthy.

Yet on the whole, despite the different levels of complication identified with regard to getting the necessary transfer information from the various sources available, most students satisfactorily transferred most or all of the credit hours earned at the community college. If they had

taken courses for which transfer credit was not a possibility they typically knew it at the time. Obtaining transfer credit was, on the whole, not identified as a significant problem area. Indeed, for the majority of the students interviewed, the mechanics of the transfer process did not present an overwhelming source of distress. However, the process of transfer extended beyond the mechanics, and there were a number of consistent problems and incidents that should be identified.

**A Review of Some Specific Transfer Difficulties**

For the majority of respondents, the mechanics of the transfer process did not present a significant problem, but in some cases it was a source of mystery for the students concerned. Although these students professed confusion, most did not show any inclination to seek clarification or pursue the matter further.

Even though the transfer of credit from Douglas College to SFU was on the whole unproblematic, there were several sources of concern. Some students identified problems associated with the transfer mechanism, that from their perspective, involved mistakes – or at least miscuing – on the part of one or the other of the institutions. This was often identified as miscommunication between Douglas College and SFU. Many of accounts provided by interviewees involved an element of misunderstanding as a central component of the difficulties the students experienced. One aspect of misunderstanding involved the difficulties which some students' experienced in trying to make sense of the information available to them regarding how to go about transferring from one institution to another.

There were also a number of problems that revolved around misunderstandings of the required procedures (whether or not the students had tried to obtain the information needed, or knew that they needed to obtain it). One of these pertained to the requirement of a *Letter of Permission* signed by SFU for students to be able to attend Douglas College and SFU concurrently.

Another area of misunderstanding for some students involved SFU's practice of bestowing "unassigned credits" in some transfer situations. Getting unassigned credit for a course meant that a student might obtain a certain number of credits in a certain subject area, but that these credits had no direct SFU course equivalency (for instance 3 credits in History, but no specific course to which

these credits corresponded). In cases where the unassigned character of these transfer credits was problematic – for instance, if they felt it necessitated them taking a similar course again – students had the option to make a case in writing to request that these assigned credits be attached to a specific course. In most cases, unassigned credits were assigned for only one or two courses listed on the students' transcript and presented little problem beyond confusion about what the numbers on one's transcript signified.

An additional area of misunderstanding for a number of students concerned the nature of their status upon acceptance into SFU. Contrary to the expectations of some, gaining general admission to SFU did *not* mean that they were accepted into their desired area of specialization. In some cases, although the students satisfied the GPA requirements for admission to SFU, they learned subsequently that they did not satisfy the higher GPA requirements for their desired program area. They had been accepted into the university but they did not qualify for acceptance into the program they wanted to take.

This leads directly to the topic of GPA, and the critical significance of GPA standing in students' experiences of the transfer process. Despite the specific concerns reported above, the actual procedures involved in transferring from Douglas College to SFU were relatively smooth and straightforward. However, students time and again reported that the *experience* of transfer was bumpy and traumatic, and much of this revolved around the lowering of their GPA following transfer to SFU. Of all the issues associated with transfer, this was the most significant and the one that consistently caused students the most grief. We now turn to a discussion of students' experiences concerning the prevalence of post-transfer decline in GPA.

**Prevalence of Post-transfer Decline in GPA**

Of the 47 students interviewed, only five reported an increase in grades following their transfer from college to university. These students claimed their grades went up because they were more interested in the course material and were responding positively to the more challenging academic environment of the university. A few students claimed that their grades had stayed about the same. However, by far the majority of respondents reported that their GPA had gone down at

university, and that in association with the decline in their grades, they had found the move from college to university difficult and stressful, sometimes to the point where they felt they had encountered a serious setback in achieving their academic goals. A few students reported being on "academic probation" because their grades had dropped to a level of marginal acceptability.

The interview respondents presented a number of different interpretations of the difference between college and university and what accounted for the decline in grades that they experienced. Many of them described college as being smaller, friendlier, and more supportive than university. They described SFU as being big, confusing, cold, impersonal, where it was hard to make friends and to penetrate the prevailing "nobody cares" attitude. Academically, they said that SFU was a much harder and more challenging learning environment. Some students elaborated on this by saying that the amount of work was more extreme, the guidelines were less clear, and a good deal more independent work and initiative were expected of them. Several students claimed that the smaller, friendlier atmosphere at Douglas College meant that instructors were more approachable and accessible, it was easier to speak out in class, and that opportunities for discussion and clarification of course material were more possible. Some were very critical of the attitudes of university professors relative to college instructors. Professors were occasionally perceived to be distant, inaccessible, and bounded by fewer expectations to be clear and communicative. In the view of one student, professors were overeducated and didn't know how to communicate on an undergraduate level. However, some students claimed that college was too much like high school, that there was too much "spoon feeding," and that because it was easier to know what was going to be on the exam, one could memorize just enough to get by and then forget it.

In addition to matters of general atmosphere and instructional style, students also attributed their decline in grades to a difference between the Douglas College and SFU marking system. Many said their marks went down because SFU "marked on a curve," which meant that the criteria for determining grades were much more stringent and competitive, and depended on the class average. Another aspect of this was non-commensurability of grades. For instance, 90% at Douglas College might count for an A+ whereas at SFU it might only count for an A-. In addition, students perceived that the competition was stiffer, that they were competing against students with higher average marks than at college, and with direct entry students who had the advantage of being more accustomed to how SFU operated and what was expected in the SFU system. Some students spoke of having to change their study strategies to suit the SFU environment; the techniques they had

learned for time management and information acquisition that worked in the college context did not serve them well at university. Although some students claimed that the greater challenge associated with university caused them to learn more, others said that they learned less because they did not have the opportunity for discussion that helped them learn, and because the university climate was one that promoted "grade thirst" at the expense of "knowledge hunger".

**Advantages and Disadvantages of Transfer**

Most interviewees maintained that despite the annoyances related to the transfer process and a declining grade point average after transfer, in the long run, transferring from community college to university was the preferred route. Community college was described as having provided solid preparation that eased the transition to university. This ease of transition was reported most often as the major advantage of transfer. Only a handful of students were dissatisfied with their chosen educational trajectory. Some would have preferred to complete the requirements for their degree within the confines of a small, intimate climate afforded by the community college. A few others felt that they should have delayed transfer to SFU. Yet, a small minority claimed there was little difference between the two institutions.

The key disadvantages specified involved adapting to two different institutions, including the need to adjust to two different teaching and learning styles. Students also commented on the extra demands placed on transfer students that were not expected of students who commenced their studies at university. These demands included being aware of the transfer process, enroling in courses that were transferable, and spending considerable amounts of time on processes and procedures related to transfer.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, we offer the following recommendations:

1. A user friendly *Transfer Handbook for Students* should be developed by the BCCAT. The purpose of this document would be to explain the mechanisms and process of transfer to

students in a clear, unambiguous, easily understandable manner. By incorporating some of the anecdotes from this report into the document, potential transferees would benefit from the experiences of students who had successfully completed the transfer process.

2. Receiving institutions should provide transfer students with a written explanation for each course that was not fully transferable. This type of documentation (which could be as simple as a checklist) could also be used for statistical purposes. That is, data generated from this type of documentation could be used to conduct analyses which would inform both sending and receiving institutions of recurrent incompatibilities in the system.

3. The process of imparting information about the transfer process should be reviewed. Students should be informed that advising is available at both sending and receiving institutions. Advisors should be responsible for ensuring that students receive accurate information. Availability of advisors (*i.e.*, hours of operation) should correspond to the needs of students. Mandatory advising sessions for all students intending to transfer could reduce the amount of confusion and frustration experienced by transfer students.

4. The coding scheme in Appendix C should be converted into a survey questionnaire and administered to first year transfer students at all British Columbia universities. In many respects, this study has been a "best case scenario" in that it examined the transfer experiences of students from institutions working in close co-operation with each other. A larger study employing survey methodology would increase the generalizability of the findings of this study and would serve to identify other problems related to transfer.

5. Community colleges and universities should continue to address the problem of declining grades after transfer. Ongoing dialogue and examination of teaching and learning practices at each type of institution could help to facilitate a smooth transition from community college to university for transfer students.

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# Appendix A

## Interview Questions

**Investigating Transfer -- Interview Questions with S.F.U. Students**

***Questions are deliberately open-ended.***

1. From what institution did you transfer?

2. Describe the transfer process (before, during, after).

3. Describe the factors and resources facilitating transfer.

4. In the transfer process, describe your experiences with the following:

   a. obtaining credit for course work completed

   b. obtaining financial aid to attend the transfer institution

   c. gaining admission to the transfer institution

   d. getting into residence at the transfer institution

   e. registering in required courses at the transfer institution

   f. changes in grades at the transfer institution

   g. other (please describe in detail).

5. Could we examine your transcript from the transferring institution?

   a. What courses were you able to transfer?

   b. Describe your experience with transferring courses.

6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of transferring from one institution to another?

## Appendix B

## Sample Bias

**Student Characteristics:**

**Table 38. Gender**

| | n=394 % | n=47 % |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 49 | 42 |
| Female | 51 | 55 |

**Table 39. Birth Year**

| | n=394 % | n=47 % |
|---|---|---|
| Before 1970 | 14 | 4 |
| 1970 to 1974 | 45 | 42 |
| 1975 to 1977 | 44 | 53 |

**Table 40. University Admission GPA**

| | n=394 % | n=47 % |
|---|---|---|
| 2.49 or less | 4 | 0 |
| 2.50 to 2.99 | 46 | 44 |
| 3.00 to 3.49 | 39 | 33 |
| 3.50 to 4.00 | 11 | 22 |

**Table 41. Number of Credit Hours Transferred**

| | n=394 % | n=47 % |
|---|---|---|
| Less than 30. | 5 | 4 |
| 30 to 39 | 29 | 20 |
| 40 to 49 | 22 | 24 |
| 50 to 59 | 35 | 24 |
| 60 | 19 | 27 |

## Appendix C

## Interview Coding Scheme

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*Douglas to SFU Transfer -- Coding Scheme for Interview Data*

INTID: _____

**Student Characteristics:**

1. GENDER:

0 = Male
1 = Female

2. Educational Trajectory (EDTRAJ)

1 = high school to DC to SFU
2 = non-school to DC to SFU
3 = other college to DC to SFU
4 = other trajectory
5 = university to DC to SFU

3. Program Specialization at SFU (SFUSPEC)

1 = business
2 = communications
3 = education
4 = general studies
5 = sciences
6 = criminology
7 = fine arts
8 = psychology
9 = history
10 = political science
11 = physical education

4. Declared major (DECLMAJ)
1 = before transfer
2 = after transfer

5. Program major in advance (PRGADV)
1 = stayed with it
2 = changed
3 = no program before transferring
4 = couldn't/can't get into major

6. Year commenced at Douglas College (STARTDC) _____ (month)
_____ (year)

7. Year commenced at SFU (STARTSFU) _____ (month)
_____ (year)

8. Full -time _____
Part-time _____

9. Reason for going to DC before SFU (reasons) (REASSFU)

1 = college as second chance (lower entrance requirements)
2 = language requirements (TOEFL)
3 = cheaper cost at college
4 = college as stepping stone
5 = reputation of college as easier
6 = geographically closer
7 = learning disability
8 = no previous experience in post-secondary education
9 = refused university admission
10= not specified
11 = no particular focus
12 = inability to transfer previous univ. credits to university
13=got accepted at SFU but told to make other arrangements by SFU

**Before Transfer**

10. Resources used (RESOURC)

1 = Douglas Calendar
2 = Transfer Guide
3 = SFU Calendar
4 = Counselor at DC
5 = academic advisor at DC
6 = Instructor at DC
7 = Counselor at SFU
8 = Advisor at SFU
9 = professor at SFU
10 = administrative personnel at SFU (other than above)
11 = student services office at Douglas
12= workshops at DC
13= brothers and sisters or other family members
14= other students who had or were going to transfer to SFU
15= brochures or handouts provided at DC
16= brochures or handouts provided at SFU
17= students who had already transferred
18 = UBC guide-calendar
19 = DC calendar confusing

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11. Difficulties with resources (RESDIFF)

1 = SFU calendar confusing
2 = various types of admission confusing
3 = lack of assistance from parents deciphering
4 = reluctant to approach counselors / advisors
5 = must plan transfer strategy (i.e. university to transfer to) well in advance
6 = prerequisites
7 = BCCAT transfer guide confusing
8 = BCCAT transfer guide not up to date
9 = incorrect information provided by counselors
10=differences between 100 / 200 / 300 / 400 level courses
11=difference between departments (e.g. psych. in arts vs. psych. in science)
12=learning all the different resources (e.g. finding out about the BCCAT transfer guide
13=understanding the transfer mechanism
14=institutional organization confusing
15=lack of personal focus made resources less than helpful
16=no real systematic use of resources
17= no one person/resource holds all the information

12. Factors facilitating transfer (FACILIT)

1 = being able to do everything over the phone
2 = counseling at DC
3 = SFU calendar
4 = SFU registration book
5 = DC calendar
6 = helpful staff registrar's office
7 = D.C. workshops
8 = counselling
9 = talking with people
10 = transfer guide

13. Plans or intentions to transfer (INTEND)

1 = since or before (from outset) beginning at DC
2 = during studies at DC
3 = upon completion at DC

14. Plan to transfer to (TRANSTO)

1 = SFU
2 = UBC
3 = BCIT
4 = Uvic
5 = university outside B.C.
6 = another c.c.
7 = a university college

15. Applied to (APPLY)

1 = SFU
2 = UBC
3 = BCIT
4 = Uvic
5 = university outside B.C.
6 = another c.c.
7 = a university college

16. Reasons for choosing courses at DC (COURSEDC)

1 = took courses that were transferable
2 = took courses specific to a program at DC
2 = took courses specific to an SFU program of study
3 = took courses for interest
4 = took courses to fulfill requirements for associate degree
5 = no clue
6 = took easy courses
7 = took courses that could get into

17. Sequence of contacting advisors (SEQADVC)

1=DC only before transfer
2=SFU only before transfer
3=DC before transfer, SFU after transfer
4=DC and SFU during the planning process
5=SFU only after transfer
6=none

18. Role of advisors and counselors DC (COUNSDC)

1 = negative experience
2 = indifferent
3 = positive experience

19. Role of advisors and counselors SFU (COUNSSFU)

1 = negative experience
2 = indifferent
3 = positive experience

20. Negative experiences with counselling/advising were (NEGCOUNS)

1 = wrong information
2 = out of date information
3 = no information
4 = inaccessible hours of operation
5 = not enough information
6 = overwhelming information
7 = inconsistent information

21. Positive experiences were (POSCOUNS)

1 = provided information verbally about what courses to take
2 = handouts about exact courses needed for specific programs
3 = information about where to look in calendar and transfer guide

22. Articulated program well established? (ARTPRGM)

0 = no
1 = yes
2 = sort of

23. Acceptance at SFU – general institutional admission (ACCPTSFU)

0 = no difficulties
1 = difficulties

24. Difficulties were (DIFFSFU)

1 = transcript delivery problems
2 = getting in after initially not getting in
3 = TOEFL scores held up admission
4 = quota system
5 = low GPA
6 = needed more required coursework
7 = need more transfer credit

25. Acceptance in desired program (ACCPTPRG)

0 = not accepted
1 = accepted
2 = still doing general studies

26. Why not accepted? (NOACCEPT)

1 = GPA too low
2 = did not have prerequisites
3 = applied too late
4 = quota full
5 = difficulty transferring credits

27. Total number of credits taken before transfer (CREDTAKE) _____

28. Number of credits transferred (CREDTRANS) _____

**During Transfer**

29. Where some courses which were not transferable? (TRANSCOUR)

0 = no
1 = yes

30. If yes, which courses not transferable (COURSENO)

1 = ESL
2 = accounting
3 = theatre
4 = sociology
5 = yes, unspecified
6= study course
7 = biology
8 = psychology
9 = philosophy
10 = communication
11 = political science
12 = marketing
13 = business
14 = mathematics
15 = physical education
16 = anthropology
17 = economics
18 = French

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31. Why were courses not transferable? (WHYCOURS)

1 = no equivalent course at SFU for DC credits
2 = DC credits weighted less at SFU (e.g. 5 cr. DC course = 3 cr. at SFU)
3 = pre-requisites required for transferable courses
4 = aware that some courses would not be transferable
5 = switched programs of study -courses for original program of study no longer transferable
6 = why courses were or were not transferred is unknown
7 = course with lower grades transferred, ones with higher grades left out
8= needed more than one level of this course to be transferable
9=course transferred, but credit wasn't (000 designation)
10 = had to take electives not relevant to program when required courses were full
11 = course from DC was not relevant to SFU program

32. Criteria for transferring credits was a difficulty (DIFFCRED)

0 = no
1 = yes

33. What was difficult about the criteria for credit transfer (REASCRED)

1 = not sure which courses were selected for transfer
2 = did not get courses transferred that were needed for program
3 = frustration about DC marks not being recognized
4 = no say in what was transferred
5 = courses transferred at a lower level (e.g., DC 300 level course transferred as an SFU 100 level course)
6 = two levels of courses needed
7 = no equivalent at SFU

34. Other issues around transfer (OTHTRANS)

1 = able to transfer into institution, but not desired program
2 = had to take placement test to get into specific SFU program

35. Was a third institution involved? (THIRDINS)

0 = no
1 = yes

36. If yes, were there any difficulties in transferring credits (THIRDDIF)

0 = no
1 = yes

37. If yes, what were the difficulties? (THIRDWHT)

1 = SFU did not recognize third institution credits
2 = Douglas did not recognize third institution credits
3 = Neither SFU nor Douglas recognized third institution credits
4 = Credits recognized but marks were not
5 =difficulty getting transcripts from previous institutions
6 = courses from other institution(s) transferred to DC, but not transferable directly to SFU (i.e., student had to go back to original institution for transcripts)
7 = complicated foreign transfer

38. Did you seek or get financial aid? (FINAID)

0 = no
1 = yes

39. What type of financial aid was sought / given? (WHATFIN)

1 = student loan
2 = scholarship

40. Were their difficulties obtaining financial aid? (AIDDIFF)

1 = no
2 = yes

41. What was the difficulty (or difficulties)? (AIDSPEC)

1 = GPA too low
2 = unclear about criteria for certain scholarships
3 = was a part-time student at two institutions simultaneously
4 = parents' income
5 = was working, but quitting to go back to school

42. Took courses at SFU and other institution concurrently? (CONCURR)

0 = no
1 = yes

42b. Where:

1 = DC
2 = distance education

43. If yes, why? (WHYCONC)

1 = only need C's at DC (mark required is less)
2 = course full at SFU
3 = DC closer than SFU (travel time)
4 = need prerequisites
5 = made for easier transition between DC and SFU
6 = DC courses easier

44. Difficulties in taking courses at both SFU and other institution simultaneously (DIFFCONC)

1 = no
2 = yes

45. What was the difficulty or difficulties? (WHATCONC)

1 = could not obtain financial aid
2 = did not know they had to obtain letter of permission to do so
3 = difficulty registering at SFU
4 = problems getting into courses needed/ wanted
5 = late appointment for registering
6 = admitted late, therefore most courses full
7 = too demanding a schedule

46. The student experienced difficulty in registering for courses through SFU Telereg (REGIFF)

0 = no
1 = yes

47. If yes, what was the difficulty (or difficulties)? (REGWHAT)

1 = given late appointment for registering for courses
2 = couldn't get into courses
3 = needed to call constantly to get through to Telereg
4 = GPA and program year controlled registration
5 = deregistered from a course because of actual or assumed lack of prerequisite
6 = got courses at undesired times
7 = unclear information about registration at SFU

**After Transfer**:

48. Did the student experience a post-transfer GPA change? (GPACHG)

1 = same
2 = lower
3 = higher

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49. Reasons suggested by the student for post-transfer GPA decline (GPALOW)

**General Institutional**

1= SFU more academically demanding
2 = the marking system at SFU (i.e. the bell curve)
3 = less peer support
4 = acclimatization to a large institution
5 =more independence required at SFU
6=student quality better/competitive

**Classroom**

7 =less discussion in class at SFU
8 =less individualized attention
9=less class time (1hr less per needed course)
10=larger classes
11=exams/ papers harder
12=exams more abstract
13=course work more abstract

**Course Content**

14=more difficult heavier course work at SFU

**Individual**

15=did not work as hard at SFU as at DC
16=taking too many courses
17=expected to happen in the process of adjusting to SFU
18=lack of focus by student
19=difficult to make friends
20=study habits developed for DC all wrong for SFU
21=organizational skills developed for DC all wrong for SFU

**Professors/TAs**

22=limited contact with actual instructor at SFU
23=uncaring instructors
24=professors focus is research not teaching at SFU
25=professors overeducated
26=class time split between professors and TAs
27=TAs do not speak English (well)
28=subject matter knowledge of TAs limited
29=discrepancies between what professors and TAs taught
30=classes less structured at SFU
31=difficulty with TA system

50. Marks are

1 = still lower
2 = going up

51. Suggestions for help with lowered GPA (GPASTRAT)

1=Visited advisor at SFU
2=learned how "it works" at SFU then devised strategies for studying, bigger workload, etc.
3= improved study habits
4 = reduced course load

52. Reasons suggested by the student for post-transfer GPA increase (GPAHIGH)

1 = worked harder right from the beginning
2 = attitude change
3 = wanted to make grades to get into specfic program

**Miscellaneous**:

53. Approval of trajectory: Was it useful to go to Douglas before coming to SFU? (TRANGOOD)

0 = no
1 = yes

54. If yes, why? (WHYGOOD)

1 = DC provided transition back into school
2 = DC was harder than high school but not as hard as university
3 = DC fostered the independent learning necessary for university
4 = DC provided more hours per week with instructor than SFU
5 = good preparation that eased the transition
6 = opportunity to meet language requirements
7 = DC was the place to decide what to do

55. If no, why not? (WHYBAD)

1 = DC does not challenge students enough
2 = DC instructors are less informed about subject matter than SFU instructors

56. Happy to be at SFU? (HAPPYSFU)

1. yes, happy about being at SFU
2. no, would have preferred to finish degree at Douglas
3. should have stayed at D.C. to finish prerequisites
4. institutions the same

57. Strategies for success (SUCCESS)

1 = keeping on top of the transfer process
2 = "drop in" clinic
3 = study habits changed

58. Differences between DC and SFU (DIFFINST)

1 = SFU has more demanding workload
2 = different marking criteria in the two institutions
3 = instructors more attentive at DC
4 = more difficult to make friends and peer support at SFU
5 = interaction with instructors better at DC
6 = smaller classes at DC
8 = more activities at SFU
9 = co-op program at SFU
10=easier telereg system/registration system at SFU than DC
11=better social life at DC
12=DC friendlier
13=more people at SFU (more friends)
14=SFU more impersonal
15=classes smaller at SFU
16=too many small assignments at DC
17=much more stress at SFU
18=DC way too relaxed
19= little difference between DC & SFU
20 = classes larger at SFU
21 = class time shorter at SFU
22 = TA-professor split time over teaching
23 = semester system at SFU interferes with friendships
24 = SFU "big"!
25 = DC more flexible
26 = more academic resources at SFU
27 = students not taken seriously at ?

59. Recommendations about the transfer process (IMPROVE)

1 = more up to date information about transfer process
2 = better office hours for advisor / counselors to accommodate to non-traditional students
3 = more specific information about workload expectations at SFU
4 = have peers who have transferred speak with future transferrants at DC
5 = more weight given to DC grades
6 = plenty of literature on the transfer process
7 = transfer link between DC and SFU
8 = more flexibility in the system e.g. be able to take courses at UBC also
*i.e.*, make transfer more universal
9 = more guidance with the course planning process
10=individual needs to do research in the process
11=use resources
12=stay in the same province
13=information should be more forthcoming
14=talk to instructors at both institutions
15=counsellors should be more knowledgeable/ helpful about transfer courses
16= more interaction between DC and SFU counselors and advisors
17= counselors need to be up to date
18= take SFU orientation even though it is for 1st year students
19=informing prospective students about prerequisites/placement exams
20=more liaising among institutions
21= DC needs to explain SFU better to students
22= students need to take active role in the transfer process



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23= department fairs/workshops for transfer students
24=D.C. should be more like SFU
25=nothing - everything is in place
26=clearer information handouts
27= more informed DC personnel
28=make DC courses more like SFU courses
29=more awareness of scholarships
30=separate section in DC calendar for transfer students
31=DC instructors should talk about future 3rd and 4th year courses
32=make course numbers the same at DC and SFU
33=make DC courses harder
34=DC and SFU should work together re: course difficulty
35=more organizational support for transfer at SFU

60. Advantages of transfer (ADVANT)

1 = easier transition to university
2 = financially less expensive
3 = easier to start at smaller institution
4 = TOEFL not required for college entrance
5 = cant take harder courses in college first
6 = benefits form interaction with instructors at DC -extra help useful down the road
7 = learn to spread out more in univ. because of CC experience
8 = chance to raise marks
9 = small class size
10 = geographic location
11 = good bridge after being out of school for a long time
12 = closer to goal of obtaining a bachelors degree
13 = prerequisites for admission not necessary (e.g., French)
14 = broadened horizons by being exposed to different systems
15 = fresh start from poor DC marks
16 = opportunity to figure out what to do
17 = peer support at DC helpful at SFU

61. Disadvantages of transfer (DISADV)

1 = waste time "processing" / doing the procedures
2 = transfer students have to spend time in courses that are transferable
3 = less latitude in courses that are not transferable; "pointless for me to take courses that are not transferable
4 = having to learn how to study for 2 different systems -always in a state of learning to adapt
5 = teaching/learning styles of teachers/students so different at each institution
6 = need to have an idea of what to expect
7 = waste of time when courses are not transferable
8 = fragmented studies
9 = arrived too late at SFU to enrol in co-op program
10 = took unnecessary courses at DC because of registration problems
11 = lose good marks from DC in transfer process
12 = harder for transfer student to get into desired program

62. Rating of transfer guide (GUIDE)

1=useful
2=confusing
3=inacurrate
4=not used

63. Examples of transfer as a mystifying process (OTHTRANS)

64. Examples of a smooth transfer process

65. Examples of playing the system